

Starting to Write: Paris, 1921 by V.S. Pritchett

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THE

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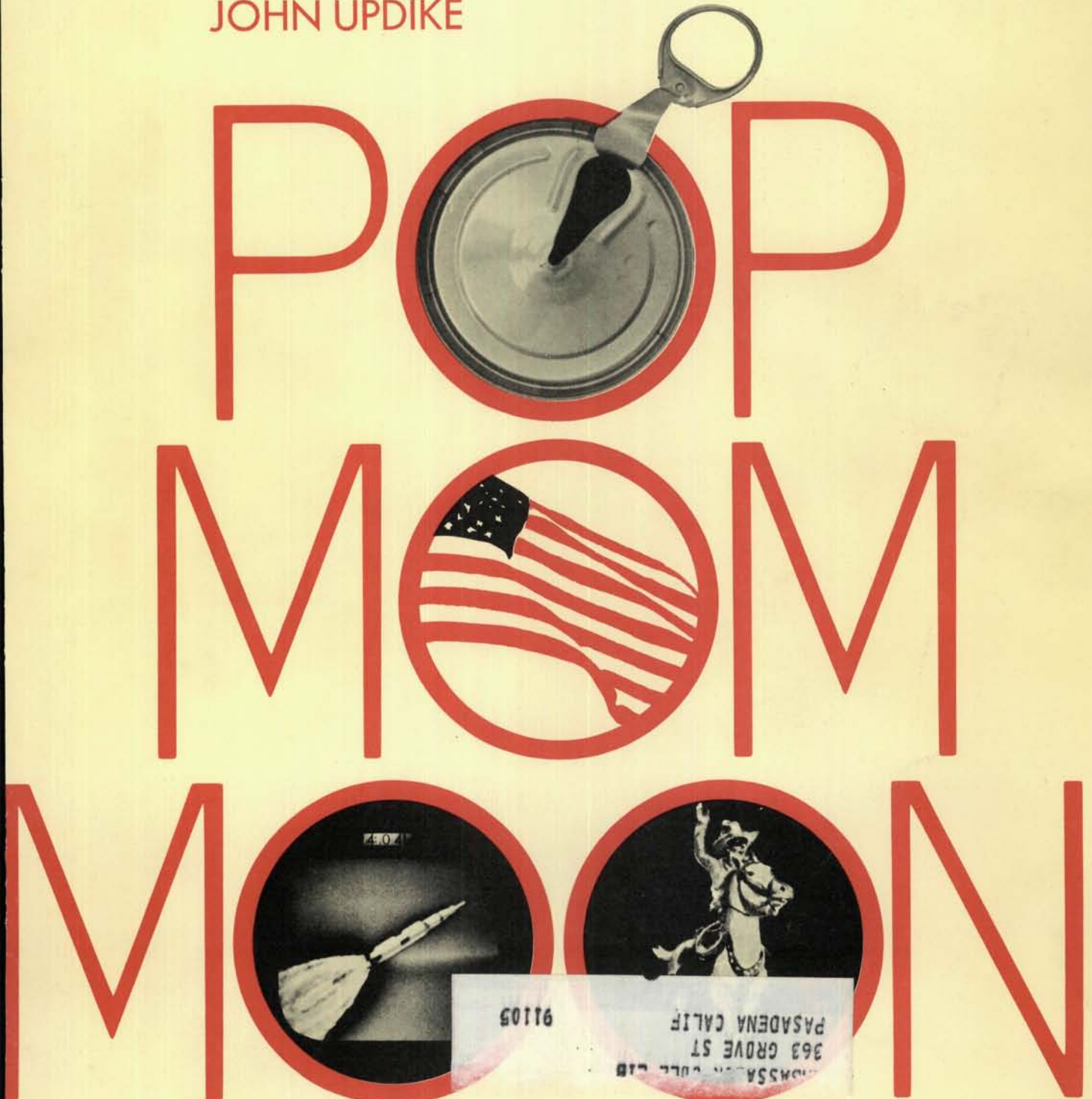
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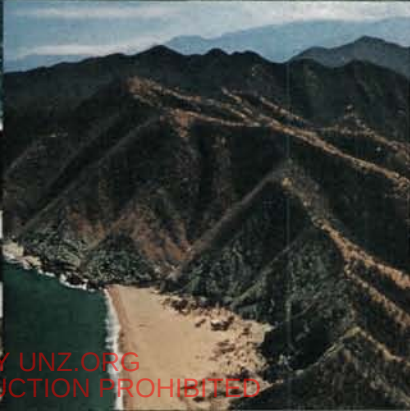
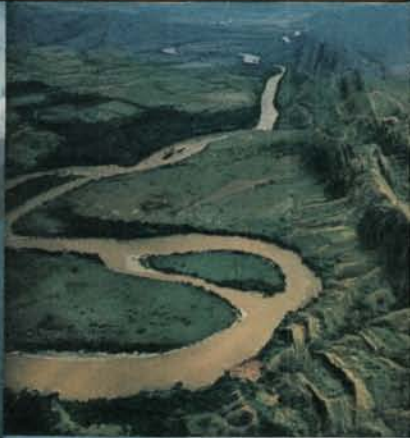
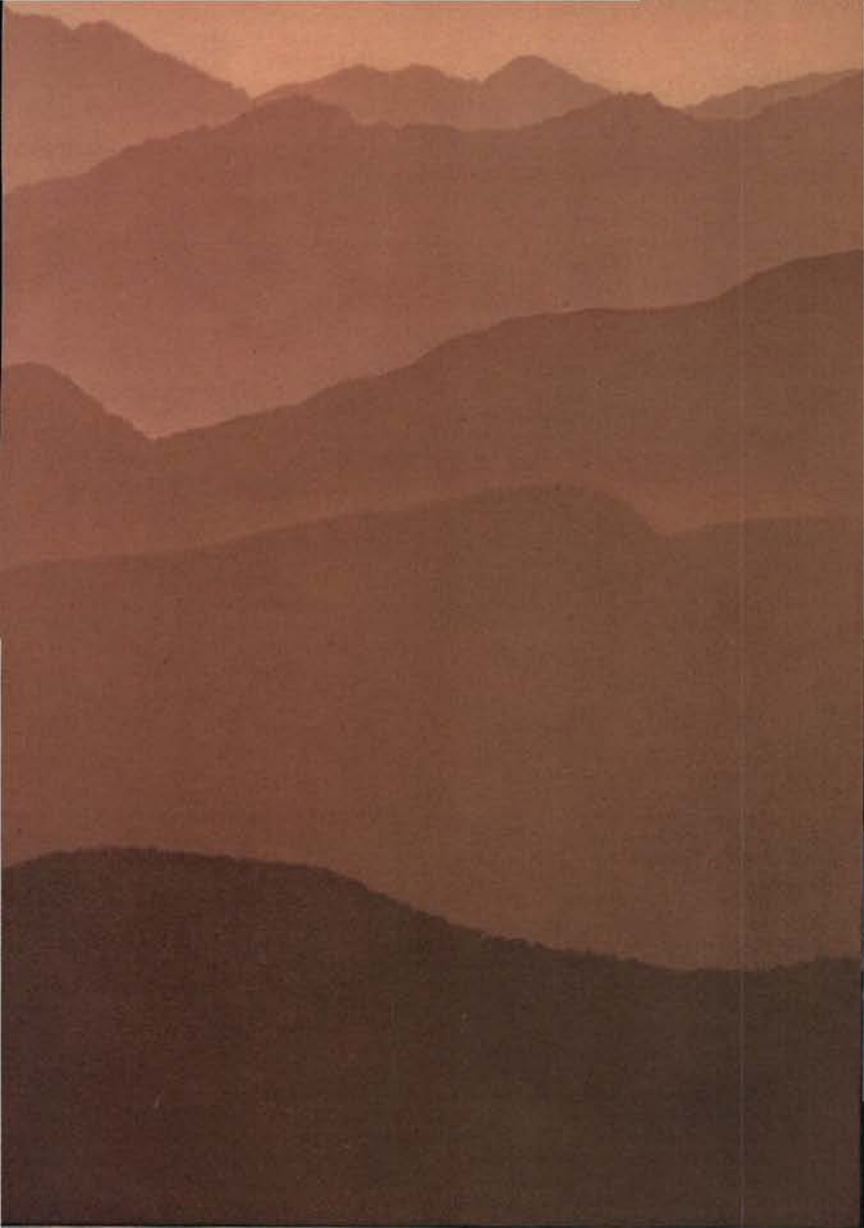
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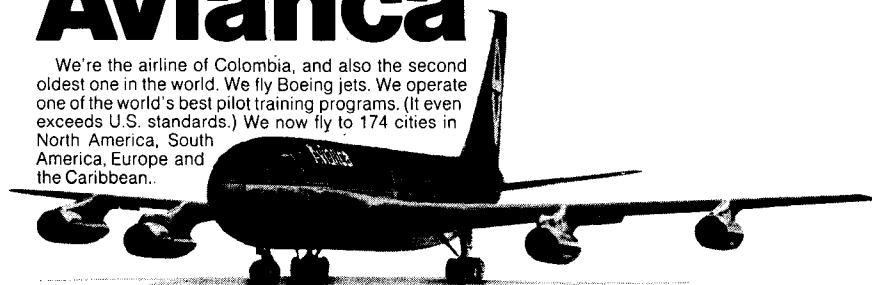
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THE ATLANTIC

JAMES C. THOMSON, JR.	35	Recollections of a Cultural Imperialist (j.g.)
GEORGE STEINER	40	A Future Literacy
IRVING KRISTOL	45	Welfare: The Best of Intentions, The Worst of Results. <i>Viewpoint</i>
JOHN UPDIKE	48	Pop/Mom/Moon
ROBERT COLES, M.D.	64	"I Am a Maid, and What Do I Know?" <i>A Portrait</i>
PETER DAVISON	68	Into the Future. <i>A Poem</i>
WILLIAM SAROYAN	71	Najari Levon's Old Country Advice. <i>A Story</i>
V. S. PRITCHETT	73	Starting to Write: Paris, 1921
MAXINE KUMIN	84	The Faint-Hearted Suicide. <i>A Poem</i>

Reports & Comment

MURRAY SEEGER	6	Washington
FLORA LEWIS	14	Prague

	4	The Editor's Page
L. E. SISSMAN	24	Innocent Bystander
	30	The Mail
	32	Contributors

Life & Letters

HERBERT GOLD	85	On Epidemic First Personism
ELIZABETH JANEWAY	87	"The End of the World Is Coming"
GORDON A. CRAIG	90	Last Prisoner at Spandau
DAVID DENBY	92	It Only Hurts When We Laugh
EDWARD WEEKS	94	The Peripatetic Reviewer
PHOEBE ADAMS	96	Short Reviews: Books

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE



Thomson and amah



Coles



Kumin

If Marshall McLuhan is right, newspapers and magazines won't be with us much longer. The historians and biographers of the future (presuming there *are* any historians and biographers in the future) will sniff over the trivia of print journalism as today's archaeologists putter among the potsherds of Persia or the petrified chicken bones of the Yucatán. Professor McLuhan is, I think, premature in his obituary notice, even allowing for the zeal of the United States Attorney General and the ambitions of the printers' unions. Still, the cave painters of Lascaux probably didn't anticipate that their medium would die out as soon as it did. Some of their work remains, but we have no self-portraits to remember them by.

Herewith, then, portraits of a few of the painters in *The Atlantic's* home cave.

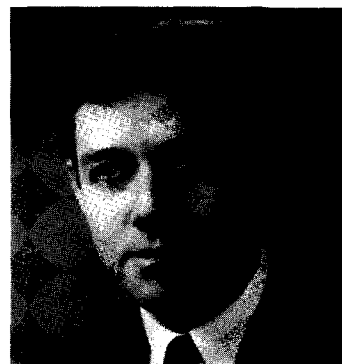
James C. Thomson, Jr., with the amah who looms large in his remembrance of his days as a beginning Cultural Imperialist (left), and Mr. Thomson as he is circa August, 1971 (right).

Dr. Robert Coles, in one of the rare moments when he was not writing a book, a magazine article, or a medical treatise.

Professor George Steiner, contemplating the literacy of the future.

Maxine (Mrs. Victor) Kumin, the poet, lives in Newton, Massachusetts, and is the mother of three.

John Updike, a Pennsylvanian turned Ipswichian Yankee.



Thomson, 1971



Steiner



Updike

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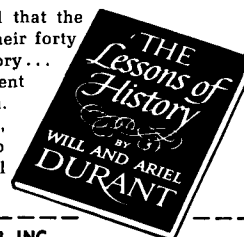
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REPORTS & COMMENT

WASHINGTON

Wilbur D. Mills of Arkansas

Air Force One was flying high over mid-America, the "pool" reporters on President Nixon's airplane were enjoying their drinks, and a top White House aide was trying to sell items from the current bag of Administration policies and proposals. In the conversation the name of Congressman Wilbur D. Mills, Democrat of Arkansas, came up, as it inevitably does in most serious discussions of legislation. The President's man replied to the mention of Mills with a quick, disparaging remark, which the reporters duly noted for later transmission to the White House press corps when the group arrived in California.

An hour later, the same aide, accompanied by Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, returned to the rear cabin to discuss another issue. When they had finished, Ziegler cautiously asked that the earlier comment on Mills be put "off the record." The one-line stab against the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee was thus lost for the printed and spoken record, but the incident illustrated the paranoid attitude that the Nixon White House holds toward Mills.

The feeling, expressed as "What is he going to do to us next?", started among Administration officials in 1969 when Mills grabbed the issue of tax reform from the Treasury and ran away with it. It was aggravated during 1970 when Mills decided he could

no longer play along with Mr. Nixon's confused foreign trade negotiations. Now the White House distress has reached a new peak, for Mills dominates the issues of welfare reform, social security, Medicare, and revenue sharing.

At the same time, Mills has been transformed from the most important congressional insider of the moment into a national figure who has usurped many of the powers usually associated with the Speaker of the House. It is clear now that the legislative record with which the Democrats will confront Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign next year will be largely determined by Mills. And it is likely that he will have a great deal to say about whom the Democrats nominate to oppose the President.

The elevation of Mills from the relatively obscure, if powerful, post of committee chairman to a role of national party leadership came suddenly following the retirement of Speaker John W. McCormack and the reorganization of the House. Mills could have contested the selection of Carl Albert (Democrat, Oklahoma) to succeed McCormack or derailed Hale Boggs's (Democrat, Louisiana) elevation to the post of Majority floor leader.

Instead, as a supporter of House traditions, he endorsed Albert soon after McCormack announced his retirement and then voted for Boggs in the contest for floor leader despite a history of strained relations with the ebullient Louisianian.

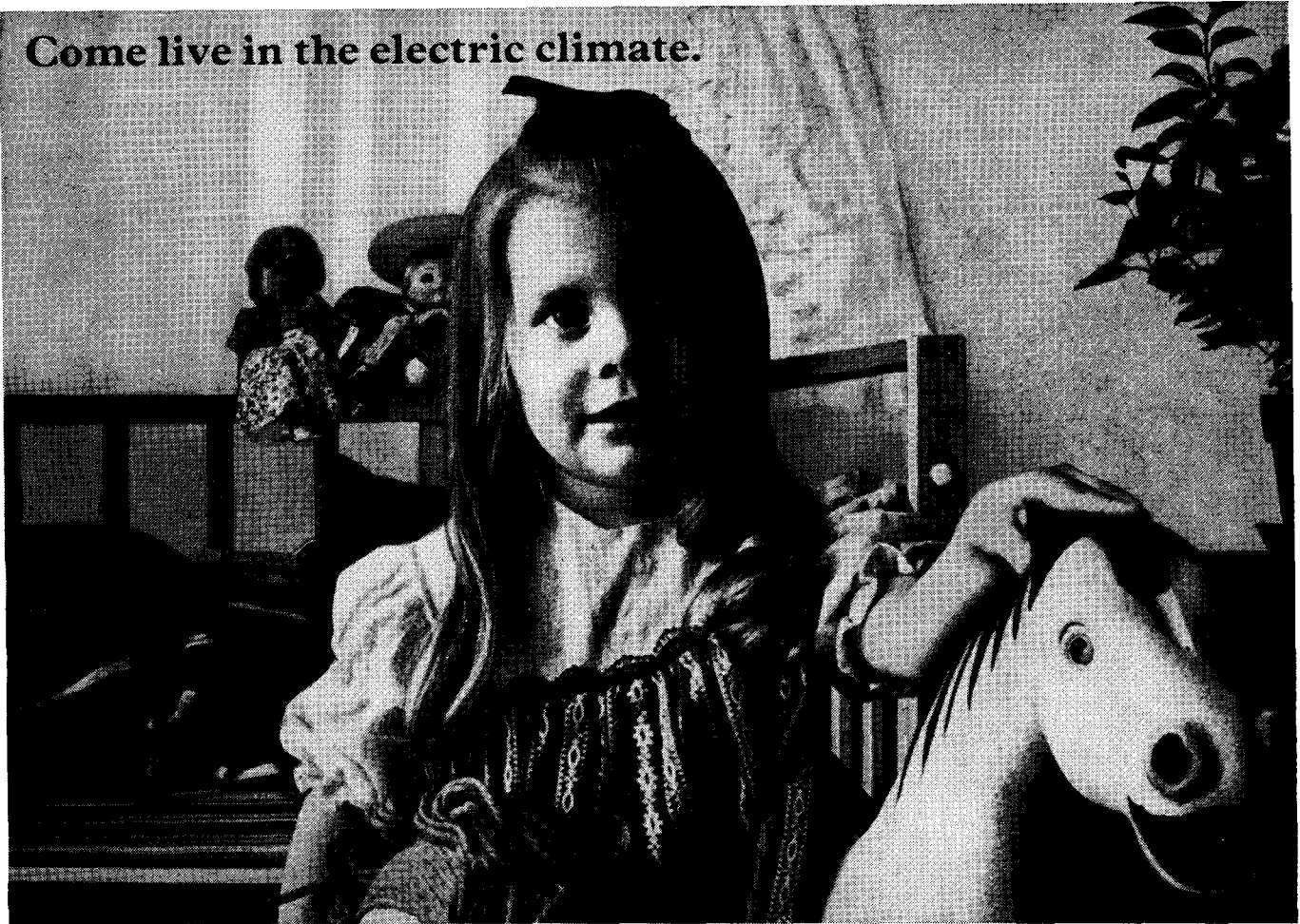
"I told everybody that I didn't want to be Speaker, but they never believed me," Mills says. "The

Speaker is a presiding officer, not a legislator. I like to legislate. I like to apply my mind against the minds of others. I like to get up on that floor and handle a bill and be ready for the questions of 430 other members."

It is Mills's legendary record as a successful legislator that has given the Republican White House so much trouble. Unlike many committee chairmen, Mills is not susceptible to ordinary horse trading with the White House—a new dam or post office in return for a bill, for instance. He has such firm control over his committee, with the influence extending to the Republican side, that the White House cannot muster a majority against him. Mills has played the statesman often enough so that it is difficult to charge him with being blindly partisan and make the charge stick. And his batting average for getting bills passed is so high under both Republican and Democratic Presidents that no Administration can afford to alienate him completely.

This spring, for instance, when the Administration sought to raise the statutory limit on the federal debt, Mills worked with the Treasury to authorize the issuance of a special series of bonds beyond the traditional 4.5 percent ceiling. Speaker Albert and Majority Leader Boggs heeded the plea of Chairman Wright Patman (Democrat, Texas) of the House Banking Committee, the most persistent Populist in Congress, to oppose the higher interest bonds. When the bill came to the floor, Boggs had a speech prepared to oppose Mills. The chairman was overheard to warn Boggs sharply against making the

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THE TRAVELERS

WASHINGTON

speech, claiming, "I helped make you floor leader." Boggs walked off the floor without making the speech, and Mills won the vote with a coalition of Administration Republicans and Democrats who chose to follow him instead of their nominal leaders.

Mills has pursued his own initiatives all year long with two goals in mind. He wants very much to see Richard Nixon defeated in November, 1972, and he wants very much to have a major role in selecting a Democrat who can accomplish that feat. To achieve these complimentary goals, Mills is intent on writing a legislative record that the Democrats can stand on.

"Nixon wins or loses on what the Democrats do in Congress," Mills said. "We can't beat something with nothing. Nixon is going to run against Congress just as Harry Truman did in 1948."

The winning Democratic combination in Mills's view is the traditional Roosevelt coalition of Northern big-city blocs and the South. If he personally can gain a position of power in the national Party, Mills can then see to it that the 1972 ticket will conform to his vision of the Party.

Out of character

Mills has had to shift out of character to carry out his plan, but so far it has been a remarkably successful change of roles. The White House has inadvertently helped him.

Early in the congressional session, Mills encouraged National Democratic Chairman Lawrence J. O'Brien to form a coordinating committee of party leaders. The group was organized but has not developed the kind of program Mills envisioned, largely because of the traditional jealousies of the leaders of each half of Congress.

But the effort indicated Mills's interest in assuming a central position in the party leadership. Soon after this move, Mills agreed to make a fund-raising appearance for the national committee in Texas. For a man who usually gives speeches only at the request of individual Ways and Means Committee members or in his home state of Arkansas, the Texas

appearance represented a major change in policy.

On the House floor, Mills went along with Senate Finance Chairman Russell Long in approving a 10 percent increase in social security benefits, overriding the Administration's proposal for a 6 percent rise. In that one action, the Democrats raised Mr. Nixon's potential budget deficit in 1972 by \$4 billion because they postponed the associated increase in payroll taxes until next year. That step also provided a sharp fiscal stimulant to the lagging economy—\$2.5 billion in 1971 alone—so that the White House may in the long run have reason to be grateful. Mills added an additional 5 percent social security increase to take effect in July, 1972, as a sweetener for the welfare-reform bill.

He also took an initiative on trade that caught the White House off guard. Convinced that the Administration could not negotiate a voluntary agreement with the Japanese and other Asian exporters to restrict their shipments of textiles into the U.S. market, Mills proposed his own plan. The Japanese accepted the Mills scheme, but the White House immediately denounced it. The chairman's finesse in handling the trade issue reportedly angered Mr. Nixon and led directly to a White House counterattack.

The White House reaction followed a pattern that has become familiar since Mr. Nixon took office—any Democrat who directly challenges the Administration must be a candidate for President.

White House staffers started advising newsmen that Mills's goal was the presidency and that everything the Arkansan did should be viewed in that light. One of the first journalists to print this theory was Kevin Phillips, the columnist who made his reputation with his book *The Emerging Republican Majority*, which articulated the GOP "Southern strategy," and who is well connected at the White House. Not only was this strategy supposed to make Mills look like just another ambitious higher-office seeker, but also it was supposed to turn against him the major Democratic hopefuls sitting in the Senate.

This counterattack was calculated to step up the pressure on Mills to relax his opposition to the Administra-

tion's revenue-sharing plan. Mr. Nixon proposes to release \$5 billion without restrictions to cities and states. The revenue-sharing campaign was also intended to provoke Democratic infighting. Many of the poverty-pleading mayors who support the Administration plan are Democrats.

Seriously?

The White House effort to undermine Mills's positions in Congress and the Party has instead enhanced his standing. Because his congressional record is so luminous and his reputation among his colleagues so high, none of them can say that Mills is not qualified for the presidency. House Democrats of all stripes have sulked for years that only senators seem to be qualified for the White House. Now Mills, a true "man of the House," is an obvious rallying point for the frustrated members of the lower chamber.

Mills has also challenged the White House counterattack directly by going on a national speaking tour. In Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Illinois, he attacked the Nixon revenue-sharing plan. In South Carolina, he challenged the White House record of failing after more than two years' effort to negotiate new protection for the Southern-based textile industry. He followed these appearances with his first performance on a national television interview program, *Meet the Press*, in June.

"I don't find much public support for revenue sharing," Mills said in a recent interview. "Most of the pressure for it comes from elected public officials."

While the hearings his committee held on general revenue sharing were directed at "killing" the proposal, Mills protected his position by promising that the Democrats would devise their own plans for helping cities meet financial needs. The alternative he suggested was sending \$3.5 billion in grants to cities, where the fiscal demand is greatest and Democratic power is concentrated.

The putative Mills candidacy cannot, on the face of it, be taken seriously in the light of modern political considerations. Now sixty-two, Mills would hardly appeal to the newly franchised voters that the Democrats are hoping will ignore tradition and

help make Mr. Nixon a one-term President. The Arkansan's vision of the Democratic platform is also more conservative and narrow than Northern party leaders are likely to accept. For him the war is not much of an issue, and he generally supports the Nixon policy of gradual withdrawal from Vietnam. Civil rights, too, he says, is not an issue. Mills has voted against all major civil rights laws, in tune with the views of his Arkansas constituency. He feels that the question is "the application now of what is really available already on the books and a recognition of the need of these people for employment and their right along with everybody else to equal opportunities for jobs."

In his home district, which includes Little Rock, the blacks "know" he understands their ambitions, just as they "know" he could not openly support the landmark civil rights legislation of the late 1960s. The folks at home also know that Mills was instrumental in getting Dale Bumpers, a progressive Democrat, elected governor of Arkansas with a statewide television appeal directed in part toward persuading supporters of Alabama's Governor George Wallace to abandon the American Independent Party.

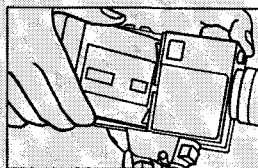
Mills has also quietly encouraged Democratic leaders of the legislature in Arkansas and other Southern states to tighten their election laws to make it more difficult for the Wallace Party to qualify for listing on state ballots next year.

"I hired out"

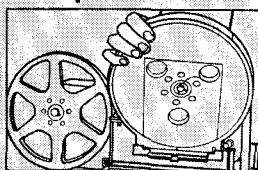
The constituency of north-central Arkansas is vitally important to Mills. Although he has faced opposition only three times in the sixteen consecutive elections he has won, Mills watches over his fifteen counties as if the district were just waiting for an excuse to elect a new man. He never forgets that the opposition he has faced always comes from the right and accuses him of being too liberal for Arkansas. Mills still lives in the modest house facing a railroad branch line that his father gave him as a wedding present thirty-seven years ago. His mother lives next door, and his brother operates the family businesses—a store, a bank, and a cotton gin.

On his frequent trips home, Mills

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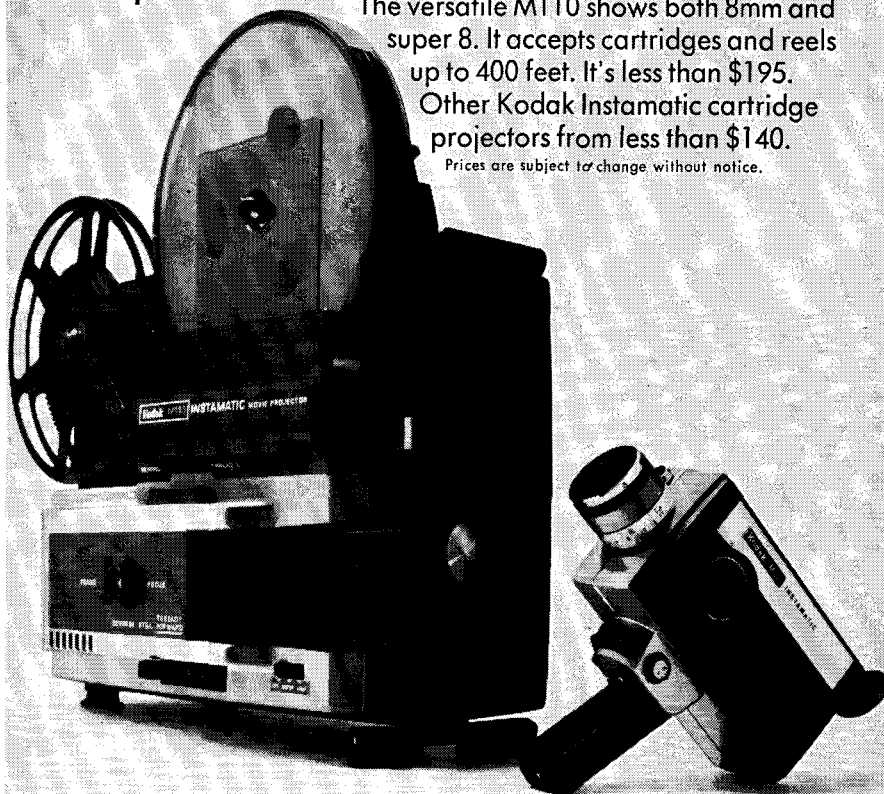
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A. Since 1938.

Q. What help does the child receive from my support? A. In countries of great poverty, such as India, your gifts provide total support for a child. In other countries your sponsorship gives the children benefits that otherwise they would not receive, such as diet supplements, medical care, adequate clothing, school supplies.

Q. Are all the children in orphanages?
A. No, some live with widowed mothers, and through CCF Family Helper Projects they are enabled to stay at home, rather than enter an orphanage.

Q. What type of projects does CCF support overseas? A. Besides the orphanages and Family Helper Projects CCF has homes for the blind, abandoned babies homes, day care nurseries, health homes, vocational training centers, and many other types of projects.

Q. Who owns and operates CCF? A. Christian Children's Fund is an independent, non-profit organization, regulated by a national Board of Directors. CCF cooperates with both church and government agencies, but is completely independent.

Q. Who supervises the work overseas? A. Regional offices are staffed with both Americans and nationals. Caseworkers, orphanage superintendents, housemothers, and other personnel must meet high professional standards—plus have a deep love for children.

Q. How do you keep track of all the children and sponsors? A. Through our IBM data processing equipment, we maintain complete information on every child receiving assistance and the sponsor who provides the gifts.

Children on our emergency list this month live in India, Brazil, Taiwan (Formosa) and Hong Kong.

WASHINGTON

slips easily into the local Southern Ozark drawl and displays his court-house-square manner. "I had a speech here, but I'm not going to use it," he told a home audience this spring. "I've found out that a Washington speech doesn't always fit in Arkansas, but an Arkansas speech fits anywhere." He ended up the same speech on this bread-and-butter note: "You didn't ask me for anything last year. You must be satisfied. But I don't want you to be satisfied. I hired out to work for you. I want you to call on me."

Clearly, the issue that Mills sees in closest harmony with other Democrats is the question of managing the economy. "I think the President has made a number of mistakes," he said on *Meet the Press*. "He has gotten himself on the horns of a dilemma. He didn't create the inflation we have, he inherited it. But then he didn't have when he came into office the rate of unemployment that exists. That must be charged to him. Now he finds himself spending money to try to reduce unemployment and at the same time continuing to fan the flames of inflation with those expenditures."

On this issue, Mills holds the high cards. His committee has the power to shift federal fiscal policy to a more stimulative position through the simple legislative device of advancing the date of scheduled personal tax reductions from mid-1972 to this year or January, 1972. This infusion of \$720 million in direct spending power in addition to the expected 5 percent social security increase would give the Democrats a good election-year claim that they did their best to counter the highest unemployment rate since 1961. These steps would also make a shambles of the Nixon budget plan for 1972, producing a deficit that would reach the \$20 billion level for the second successive fiscal year.

If anyone can put together a new North-South Democratic coalition, Mills is the man. He learned bloc politics in his first election campaign for White County judge in 1934. As he describes it now, the incumbent held office through his allies in Searcy, the county seat and largest town, while keeping the other towns in the county divided. One of the old powers who

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helped the incumbent was Mills's father, owner of the biggest store and only bank and cotton gin in Kennsett, a small railroad-junction town whose other best-known native is Bill Dickey, the former great Yankee catcher.

Wilbur Mills, a graduate of the best small college in the region, Hendrix, and the Harvard Law School, challenged the political Establishment by campaigning hard among the small towns against the "courthouse gang." He won that election and the next one and was then ready when the incumbent congressman, William A. Oldfield, died.

"I only wanted to do one thing all my life and that was to be elected to Congress and become a member of the Ways and Means Committee," Mills recalls. "I guess I got that idea when I was ten or eleven years old. I remember the congressman coming to town. He would climb down from the train and go up to the hotel and have a dinner for a few of his friends, including my father. That was his style of campaigning. I met him then and remembered that he was a member of the Ways and Means Committee."

In his first year in Congress in 1939, Mills again challenged the Establishment in the person of Speaker Sam Rayburn. The young Arkansan and another newcomer from New York, Walter Lynch, decided to fight what they considered poor committee assignments.

"Walter and I challenged the leadership and came within a few votes of winning," Mills said. "That was when I learned that New York politics and Arkansas politics aren't much different."

In 1941, Mills got the coveted assignment to Ways and Means, and Lynch soon followed. That experience thirty years ago influenced Mills last February to help many of the liberal newcomers to the Democratic caucus get better committee assignments than freshmen traditionally get.

One of the powers of the Ways and Means Committee on the Democratic side is its double-duty role as the assignment-making "committee on committees." The Majority members of Ways and Means are chosen by region and serve as assistant Whips. After Representative Herman Badillo of New York publicly credited Mills

with helping him move from potential exile on the Agriculture Committee to the vital Education and Labor Committee, Mills said: "I know how they felt. I did the same thing."

Mills's youthful audacity and ability brought him to the attention of the legendary Speaker Sam Rayburn and assured his climb up the leadership ladder. From Rayburn, Mills learned the politics of consensus, the essentiality of drawing up legislation in committees that is likely to pass on the floor without substantial amending, the legislative philosophy of Lyndon B. Johnson.

"We had the same teacher," Mills observes when his similarity to Johnson as legislator is pointed out.

"Old Mills's Stream"

Now, in Washington, Mills is one of an elite handful who has served more than half his lifetime in the House. His ear is sought by the President, foreign ambassadors, Cabinet members, influential tax attorneys all over the nation, as well as other members of Congress and constituents. Previously, these contacts

were almost entirely concerned with the multiple legislative responsibilities of his committee. This year, because of the vigorous Mills-for-President talk by his friends and colleagues, more and more of the calls deal with national politics.

Mills has given no hints of who might be his candidate if and when his own bubble breaks. The only presidential name he mentions regularly is John F. Kennedy, for whom he had a deep affection. One of the proudest sights in Mills's home district is an Army Corps of Engineers dam at Heber Springs, which Kennedy dedicated a week before he was assassinated. A handsome bust of the young President faces the clean wall of the dam in its narrow, deep canyon. There are many other monuments to the chairman's power in Washington decorating his large district, but none is more important than the dam site where JFK offered to sing "Down by the Old Mills's Stream," if it would help get support for legislation. A lot of other candidates are trying to learn the words to that nebulous melody.

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PRAGUE

There was an old Communist joke about the man who died and was offered his choice of the Communist hell or the capitalist hell. He took the Communist hell.

"What?" said the clerk. "You've been a Communist all your life. Are you really so faithful you want to go on for all eternity? You must be a true believer."

The man replied, "That's not it. As you say, I've been a Communist all my life, and I know how things work. But in the capitalist hell, the fire will probably really burn, and the brimstone will really sting, and the pitchforks will really be sharp."

In the first cycle of Czechoslovak Communist rule, from 1948 until the fall of Antonin Novotny as Party chief in 1968, one thing did work. The economy was sliding downhill, true; Czechoslovak youth were repelled by the rulers of the new society; and the intellectuals felt choked by Party demands. What did work efficiently and effectively though was the terror. Throughout the East German uprising of 1953, the Polish upheaval and Hungarian revolution of 1956, and the gradual Rumanian withdrawal from Soviet hegemony in the early 1960s, Czechoslovakia stayed in line without so much as a Soviet platoon stationed on its soil.

The "administrative controls," as mass arrests, purges, trials, and other more subtle forms of pressure for conformity were euphemistically called, were adequate. People kept their mouths shut and did their best not to break the unspoken and sometimes mysterious rules for avoiding trouble. But the order gradually broke down, crumbling from inside the Party, initially over strictly economic issues. Then, in 1968, spring came to Prague.

There was a burgeoning of criticism, of innovation, of pressure for change and for a basic restructuring of the way authority was exercised. This awakening was suddenly stilled by the Soviet invasion of August, 1968. Three years later, the second cycle of undiluted Party rule is developing. But the terror isn't what it seems. In keeping with the old joke, it no longer works either.

There is, with hindsight, a general

understanding of what the invasion was about. It had nothing to do with any real or even imaginary threat from West Germany (the excuse for it that Moscow gave at the time), nor with any other questions of military security. This now shows clearly enough in Moscow's indulgence of Bonn's efforts to normalize relations with Prague. The five Red Army divisions deployed in Czechoslovakia are not posted on the borders with the West—with West Germany and Austria—but along an arc stretching from the northwest border with East Germany to the southeast border with Hungary. That is, the Western front is still manned by the Czech Army, regardless of how reliable it may be, and the Soviet force is strung behind it, through the center of the country.

The essential purpose of the invasion, as now perceived by Czechs who still bother to analyze it, was to assure the unquestioned primacy and authority of the Communist Party. Evidently, Moscow came to the conclusion that First Secretary Alexander Dubček's reforms were eroding and endangering just that. What historical evidence is available supports this judgment, but in any case, since it is what people in Prague now think, it is the premise on which they act.

Them

Conversation between father and son, repeated for my benefit:

Father: "You're old enough now to join the Party. When will you get started on it?"

Son: "You know I don't want to be involved with politics. There's nothing useful I can do, and I don't see why I should pretend."

Father: "With your languages and your training, you could have decided to be a teacher or an engineer or something like that. But no, you decide you want to go into foreign trade, you want to travel. All right, that's a political field. You know very well you can't do any of that without getting involved with politics. You made your choice, and if you choose that sort of thing, then you have to accept what goes with it. You can't take the cherry without the pit; you have to face up to it."

The son accepted the advice and applied to be a Party member.

In the same way, the country now

appears to be accepting the Party without in any way accepting its arguments. Neither conviction nor fear impels people, only a kind of bemused survivalism. The young harbor more anger, more irritation than their elders who lived through it once before, and who managed to survive.

Conversation with two friends, A and B:

I say: "In the old days, you only told me jokes and made cracks when we were outside walking. Now you sit in this public place where anyone can hear you, where there's bound to be surveillance because of all the foreigners, and you don't seem to worry at all. You don't even glance around to see if someone's listening. Is there no more need to be afraid, then?"

A: "Well, it's true I was more afraid in the spring of 1968, the last time you were here, than I am now. That's because in 1968 I was afraid it wouldn't last. Now I know this will last, so what's the good of worrying?"

B: "It's different for us now. We hear all the same old slogans, all the same old threats. We see all the same old mistakes and the same old empty promises. It's all familiar, and you don't react the second time. Even if they went back to the midnight knock on the door, and the disappearances and the labor camps (which hasn't happened on any scale, so far), it wouldn't be as frightening as it was before. We know now what happens if somebody disappears. We know what happens if you're put in jail. There really isn't any unknown anymore, so you live your life as best you can, and if you have bad luck, well . . . it's nothing to be surprised about."

The old city, one of Europe's most beautiful and best preserved, still absorbs and delights and soothes with its testimony to human imagination and endurance. It is being looked after, softened and brightened for the pleasure of the people. The drabness which characterized Prague before 1968 and kept reminding everyone that life was hard and authority real has not returned. The electric lights in the streets around the Old Town Square have been replaced with gaslights in handsomely wrought posts. The gentle yellow glow curls around the baroque arabesques of the old facades and sidles up to the ornate roofs. Warm, happy, easygoing dreams are not discouraged.

A man in his forties, a man who likes to laugh and take his comforts, says:

"You see, the Hapsburgs were here for three hundred years, and they didn't Germanize us. The Russians can be here three hundred years, and they won't Sovietize us. We always outlast them."

Not much of a dent has been made in that comfortable resort to the long view. The Good Soldier Schweik is still around, more roguish and insidious than ever, with his sly, knobby peasant's face, reminding his people that you can enjoy yourself in the worst of times and survive as well, if you learn the knack. *The Good Soldier Schweik* was invented by the writer Jaroslav Hašek, and first published in 1920-1923, to divert and hearten his countrymen, who had chafed under Austrian rule. But the Good Soldier is more of a reality in the cafés and cubbyholes of Prague than Party leader Gustav Husak and his government. There isn't as much in the way of banners and slogans and flags and mammoth portraits of the glorious leaders as there used to be. There are, instead, the lovely buildings and the theater posters and advertisements for art shows, and especially there is Schweik, winking from a beer coaster or a decal. His motto, universally understood, is "Don't excite yourself."

Lid

It wouldn't be easy for the most hardhearted of regimes to cope with that attitude. This regime is trying not to be so hardhearted as to provoke the people once again into utter lassitude, utter refusal to help make the country function at all.

Husak is struggling on a tightwire to hold his line of "consolidation" against the hard-hitters, like Party official Alois Indra, and to avoid mass arrests or dramatic trials which could rend the Party itself. He seems to have Moscow's support. Certainly, Moscow would be more embarrassed than it is now if it had to resort to the old terror to assure control. And it might not succeed if it tried. At the same time, Husak must hold the lid down tightly enough to make sure no one misunderstands the season. Spring is over, and the question is only whether things will stay as they are or get worse. From the rulers'

view, it is essential that everybody understand this clearly, because it was the hope for more change, more liberalism, that stirred up the country in 1968, until Moscow ended it.

Writers, journalists, directors, actors, and especially television personnel are the people most exposed and most watched, because it is they who set a country's moods and spark its hopes and fears. Many of them have been punished, mostly with removal from any but menial jobs. Some have been jailed. Most painters, singers, designers, people whose art is totally devoid of political implication, have escaped personal trouble so far, as have the people who just go to work every day and go home, minding their own business.

Soviet force is real enough behind the current, papier-mâché reign of terror. But for all its muscle, the government finds it difficult to select the best means to fit its ends. It is said that Colonel Emil Zatopek, the Olympic runner and former head of physical training in the Czech Army, was punished for his outspoken opposition to the invasion by being stripped of all privileges and made to earn his living as a garbage collector. The people learned his route and gathered on corners to help him, giving little cheers as they hauled ash cans together. That was officially unacceptable. Zatopek had to be submerged in the masses, not displayed to them.

One writer, demoted from one job after another, yearned to be a bus driver rather than accept a mindless little office job. But he realized that it was probably an impossible hope. Contact of recognized figures with the general public, however innocent, is felt by the regime to be provocative, and the regime is right. The people show their feelings in insidious ways when opportunities arise. Obviously, that is why there are constant rumors and constant denials about the current occupation of Alexander Dubček, the 1968 Party leader. What he is doing doesn't matter so much to officialdom as that he be more or less invisible doing it, lest he become a magnet for subtle expressions of forbidden opinion.

Above all, punishment with sharply reduced earning capacity and occupational degrading is an awkward procedure for the self-proclaimed representatives of the prole-



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PRAGUE

tariat. It seems to speak tomes about their real attitude toward simple workers. The leaders have found no solution to this ideological handicap for a proletarian state. They appear to be embarrassed about it, but they go on shoving the "culprits" of 1968 down among the workers—as inconspicuously as possible, however. When a supporter of Dubček who is marked for purge from influence of any kind is old enough to qualify for the state pension, officialdom seems almost grateful. Rather than being deprived of the pension, as was the practice in the real terror, the person is encouraged to retire and do nothing.

Blanking out

So there is calm, an everydayness about the life of Prague. The mood might be called one of resignation, but there is something more: a quality of unreality, of suspended animation. In Kafka's city, people go through all the ordinary motions of their joint existence and blank out, as Kafka did, the ordinary meaning.

In conversation, an artist says:

"I just go on with my work. I wasn't really involved before, and I'm not involved now. Every weekend we go to the country, and I chop wood or garden or do repairs on the cottage. I don't think about politics or talk about it. What is there to say? I have some exhibitions scheduled abroad. So far, I've no reason to think I can't go. So far. So far, there's been no trouble exporting pictures."

"There is calm, then?"

"All is calm, but it is external calm. Not internal. That is quite different. Do you understand?"

There are a few political jokes, not so biting as the old ones, and they are exchanged rather casually, without the tingle of excitement that whispered satire once brought:

—"TV news comes in three categories: true, probable, and false. The time signal is in the first category, the weather report in the second, and the rest in the third."

—"Czechs are silly to keep agitating for color television. We already have it. The pictures are black and white, and the programs are Red."

But there isn't much interest in

"I care very deeply for each last one of them. They are gallant and good. And I cannot fathom where all their love had gone before I came."



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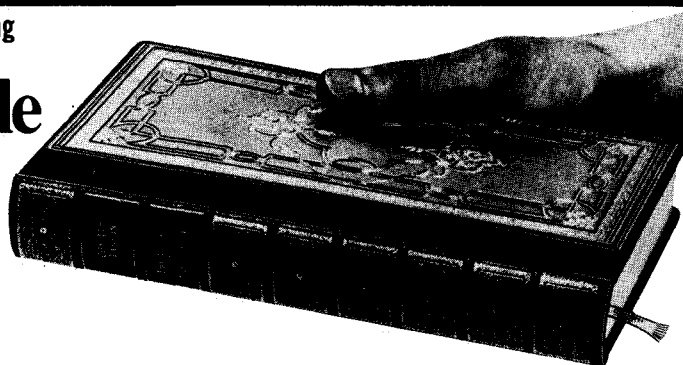
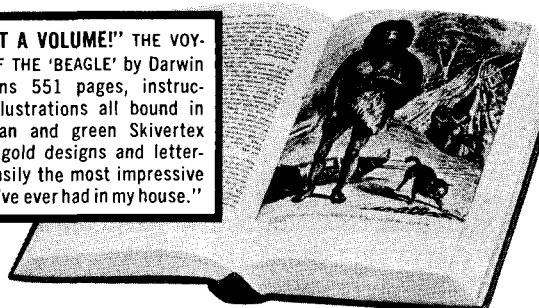
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PRAGUE

tossing this sort of dull dart. There are other matters to concentrate on: one's country cottage—which has become the national obsession—sports, clothes, vacations, household goods, things and more things to acquire.

That is the central peculiarity of it all. Unable to tap the people's energy with ideology or emotion, reluctant and probably wary of trying to drive them with fear, the cold Communist government of Czechoslovakia has begun to rely on consumerism. It has stocked the stores with consumer goods to lure its people into picking themselves up and caring again about getting work done.

In late 1969 and early 1970, consumer goods nearly disappeared. This was partly the result of an inflationary siege begun in that heady spring of 1968, when labor unions began acting like unions and factory managers had some freedom to act like management. It was partly the result of subsequent reimposition of tight controls, which took away what urge there was to raise productivity. And it was partly the result of plain and widespread apathy. The unspoken popular creed, in the manner of Schweik, was "Don't exert yourself." There is a saying among Czechoslovak workers that "Communism has its faults, but it's better than working."

One product vanished after another—women's underwear, children's shoes, bed linens. The department stores and specialty stores emptied out, and then the grocery stores grew bare. There was a meat shortage, an egg shortage, a butter shortage, as people snapped up food for lack of anything else to buy. The winter of 1969 was very severe, and there were coal shortages and power failures. The streetlights weren't turned on until 9 P.M., and that Christmas many women found the gas pressure in their ovens too low for their holiday roasting and baking.

The hard-liners blamed it all on the period of reforms. This, they said, is what moving toward a market economy brings: factories produce for export to make hard-currency profits, and neglect domestic needs.

So the Husak regime imposed more controls. These led to soaring rates of absenteeism and staggering

demands on the national insurance budget as more and more workers reported themselves sick.

Whoever was to blame, it was an economic collapse in a once rather prosperous nation. The government came finally to see the collapse as a serious political problem. Morale was at rock bottom. So in desperation, the regime introduced consumerism. Substantial foreign credits in the East and the West had been built up during the years when the economy was functioning. The decision was made to splurge them on consumer goods, to meet the sense of emergency at first and then, it was hoped, to ignite once more the stalled engine of production.

Now the shops are bulging again. Oranges and bananas were available all through the winter of 1970-1971, an unheard-of luxury in the bitter 1950s and early 1960s. There are refrigerators, washing machines, even dishwashers—small, rather old-fashioned and clumsy, and wildly expensive, but they are there for the buying. There are even Italian knit dresses and shoes, French perfumes and cheeses, British woolens, German record-players, as well as some of the more tempting products of the ruble bloc. The Western imports, which cost the state hard currency, often go for from five to ten times the price of domestic and Communist-bloc goods, but they are traded vigorously, and the shops, now refurbished attractively, are always crowded and busy.

"Of course it's worth paying 350 crowns for an Italian handbag when I could get a Czech one for 50," a friend told me. "It's that much better quality. It has to be, because we know how we work, so we know what our products must be like no matter how they look on the shelf."

There are arguments within the regime on how consumerism is working. Some say it will get the economy launched in a few more months, some say it will take a few more years, some say it can take a decade. But despite the near depletion of the backlog of credits abroad, there seems to be a consensus within the regime that it will work—if only because no one can think of anything else that might. And, in fact, production is beginning to climb again.

"It shouldn't be too hard," an economist said. "Labor discipline is so bad, work is so shoddy and slack now.

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Right now our nation's electric power system is hard put to meet the needs of consumers in several parts of the country. Brownouts are a fact . . . and there's grave likelihood of blackouts.

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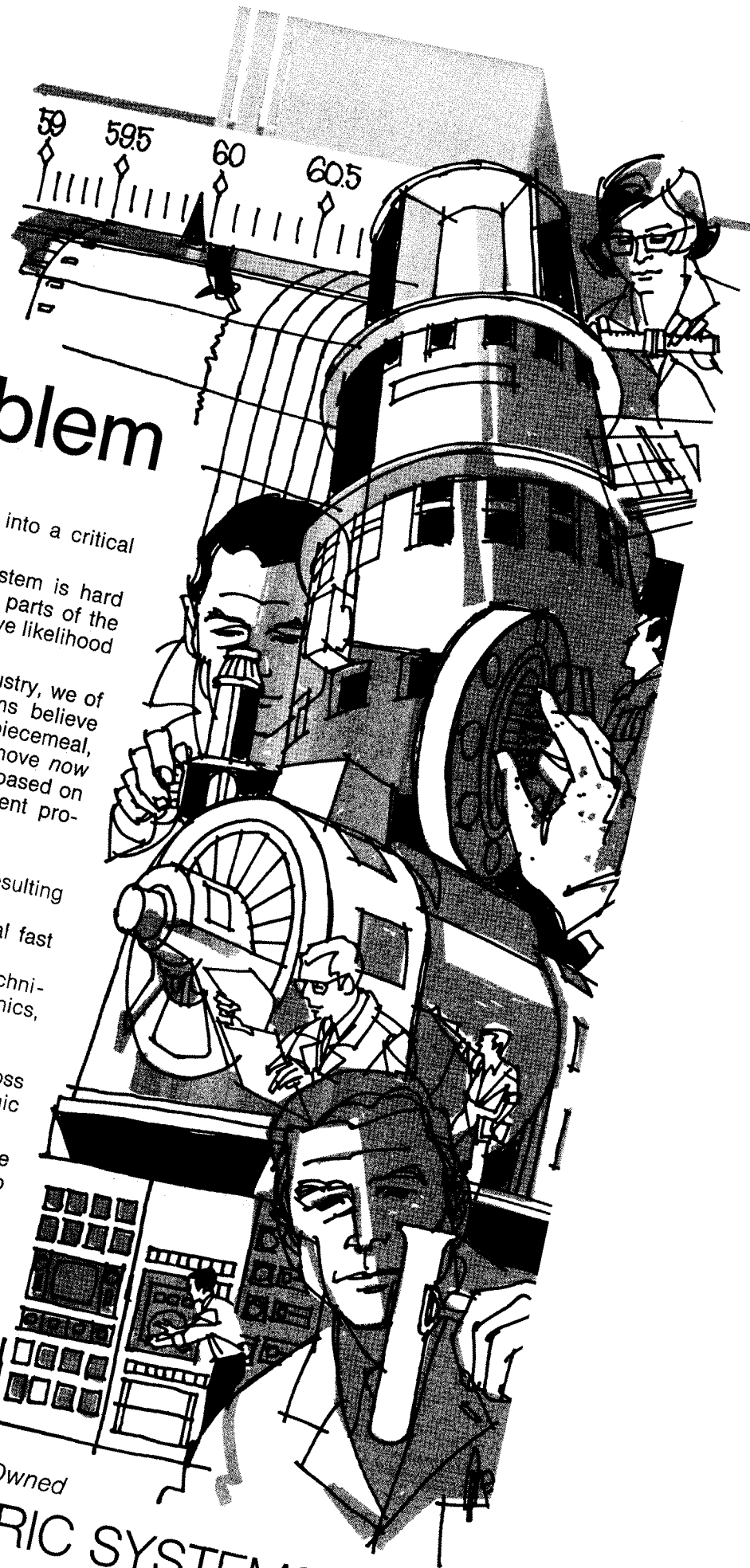
- work out methods to eliminate pollutants resulting from coal and oil combustion.
 - get on with the development of the liquid metal fast breeder reactor.
 - accelerate the exploration of yet undeveloped techniques for power generation, such as magnetohydrodynamics, nuclear fusion, geothermal steam.
 - reassess our hydroelectric potential.
 - develop better means of transmitting power across our country . . . fully exploring the practicalities of cryogenic systems, extra high voltage, utility corridors.
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We of America's rural electric systems believe that through a national energy policy and research program we can use our great technological capability in the best interest of all Americans.

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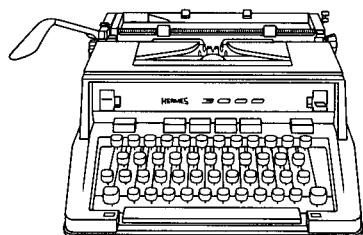
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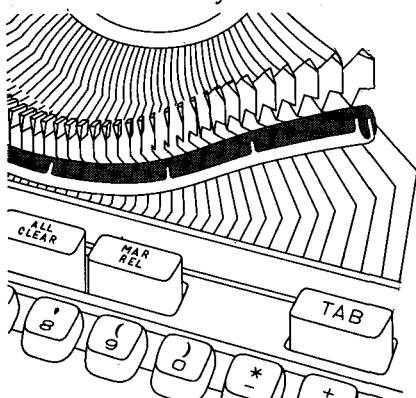
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When they turn out an electric for less than a manual, they've got to be scrimping on something. That fancy little motor must be paid for.



Whereas with our manual we can put every penny into the machine.

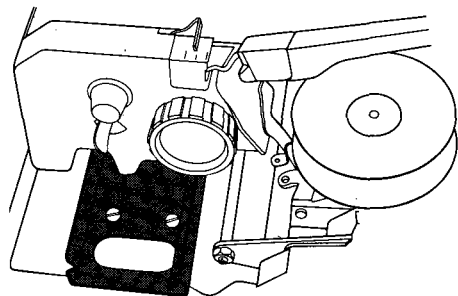
For example (1) take the little hammers that carry the letters. Ours



come softly to rest on a cushioned bar. Theirs jolt to rest—on thin air.

Then (2) we connect our hammers to the keys with sturdy, durable levers. Theirs depend on fragile coil springs.

(3) Our carriage runs on a track that's wider and deeper than



theirs, so you can slam it across without jarring the machine to bits.

Worth considering, because often on the cheaper electrics, surprisingly you still have to return the carriage by hand.

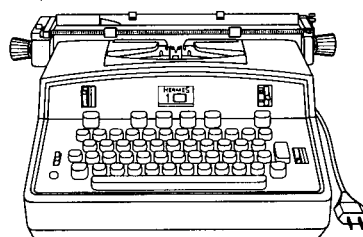
(4) As for portability: the electric really isn't. It ties you to the



house with its plug. While our manual works outdoors in the sun, on the sands.

Plus (5) they can't afford to give you all our helpful extras. Like our exclusive Flying Red Margins®. And our unjamming key, for when hurrying fingers somehow jam up the keyboard.

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PRAGUE

Even a slight gain in productivity would mean billions for the gross national product."

Kafka at home

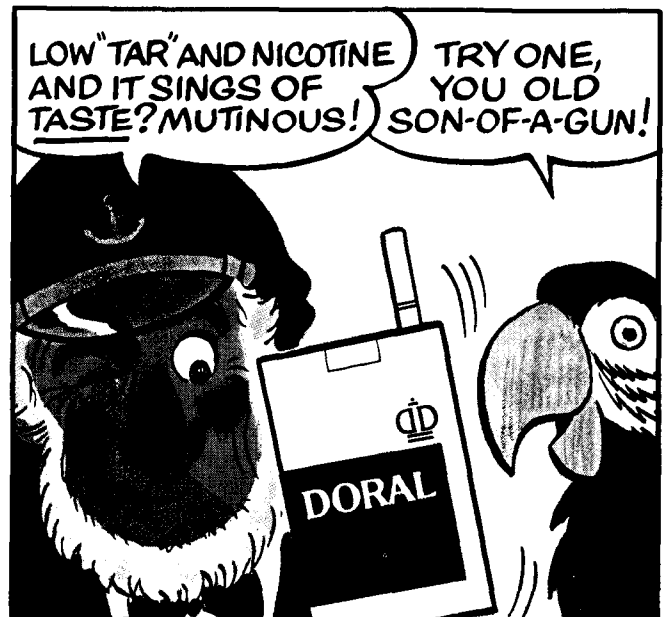
Materialism, then, is the term upon which the government and the people seem to be coming together. It is an unusual thesis upon which to base a Communist regime, a regime which is now devoted above all else to the preservation of the Communist Party's monopoly of power. It seems all the more odd and old-fashioned to an American, coming from a society steeped in arguments about the "quality of life" and the evils of materialism and the need for protection of nature, a society whose youth have developed contempt for materialism as the curse of capitalism.

There is scarcely any of the talk in Communist Prague that is heard among radicals in America. If the slogans ("free enterprise," or "Communist ideals and the just cause of the worker") were beeped out, Prague talk and Rotarian talk would sound much alike. People don't read the newspapers in Prague, or listen to the government's endless exhortations and reports, but they do have a sense that life is not tranquil out in the big, rich Western cities.

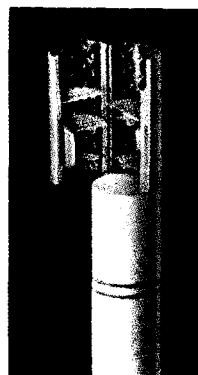
"We know about your American restlessness and your frustrations," a woman said. "We know what you are saying about having too many things, and the crisis of industrial society. But it really doesn't concern us in the least. We don't share any of those worries. You see, we have no lack of desires to fulfill." And an old Communist said later, "Yes, those problems that are stirring you will come to us one day too. We will begin to think of them when we feel affluent, I'm sure, because consumerism really doesn't solve all the needs of society. But that's a long way off. There's a lot to be done first just to keep the country going."

Kafka would feel at home again in Prague. It isn't quite a real world. Nothing is what it calls itself. But then, Czechs don't bother reading ideological or political or philosophical labels these days. They are busy existing.

—FLORA LEWIS



The filter system you'd need a scientist to explain... but Doral says it in two words, "Taste me"



FILTER: 14 mg. "tar", 0.9 mg. nicotine, MENTHOL: 13 mg. "tar", 1.0 mg. nicotine, av. per cigarette, FTC Report NOV. '70.

Innocent Bystander



The Sex Biz
by L. E. Sissman

Time was when a voyeur was a sick—or at least kinky—individual who got his sexual jollies by watching other people doing it, and we felt superior to and sorry for him. Today, willy-nilly (mostly nilly), America is fast becoming a nation of 200 million involuntary peeping toms, a state of affairs I'd like to deplore in the most scathing terms.

Let me begin by saying that I'm not for censorship; this century's classic legal battles for freedom to treat of sex in print and elsewhere were too hard-won and their consummations (no pun intended) were too devoutly to be desired for us to step back now behind a veil of mid-Victorian hypocrisies. At the same time, though, I think that the sanctity of our private lives, not to mention that of our literature, is being increasingly threatened by the cynical commercial exploitation of secondhand sex.

The sexual life of a human being is a delicate balance between the ideal and the real, between the pragmatic and the impossible, worked out painfully over a period of years—adolescence and early adulthood—until an accommodation, an adjustment that will last for life, is finally arrived at. However imperfect that adjustment, it is at least a partial solution to the problem; it permits us to give and receive love, to build an ongoing family relationship, and to free some of our interests and energies for other concerns, of which excellence in our work is the foremost. Until fairly recently, our sexual expectations were modest enough so that we could accept a partial fulfillment as a condition of life and go on to other things.

Now, though, we are constantly in-

vited by the media to participate voyeuristically in the supposedly ideal sex lives of others, to be intimidated and made guilty by that ideality, and to preoccupy ourselves with our own sexual betterment through any one of the dozens of quick, sure cures that proliferate today as wonder diets used to do.

The first step of this highly commercialized (though not conspiratorial) brainwashing process occurs when we have our sexual expectations raised for us by contact with some magazine or book or movie. *Playboy* is the proto-villain in all of this, the first mass pusher of the drug of sex to the sensually disadvantaged of all ages, the first mass packager of denatured (and dehumanized) female flesh, the first mass marketer of measured doses of addictive sexual sensation, as Walt Disney was the first mass marketer of measured doses of addictive cruelty. Like Disney, *Playboy* went about its dirty work of prettifying, trivializing, and making palatably cute (for example, "Bunny" for paid temptress) a part of the human condition within certain well-defined limits of "decency." Thus it is not alone because of postal regulations that *Playboy* has not, until very recently (and then very timidly), admitted pictorially the existence of pubic hair; it is also partly because *Playboy* needs desperately to be accepted by reader and advertiser alike as an unsubversive, overground publication that is part of the system, and partly because *Playboy's* sick male-chauvinist "philosophy" cannot admit the existence of a woman's sexual power, as signified visibly by pubic hair. In fact, *Playboy's* central marketing strategy is to sell fantasies of women as powerless, grateful sexual slaves to men who have found women far otherwise—strong, demanding, and frightening—in real life.

But if *Playboy* confines itself to selling sanitized masturbatory fantasies, other magazines, books, and movies—for a variety of motives, ranging from literary integrity to naked greed—do not. Perceiving our growing permissiveness, they have rushed to fill the vacuum with millions of feet and words of increasingly "frank" sexual portrayal. Just four years ago, the movie *Blow-Up* created a small sensation with a single fleeting glimpse of frontal nudity; this year, no self-re-

specting film would dare make its debut without several long, dull, narcissistic, and often insufferably arty stretches of what John Coleman, the astringent movie critic of the *New Statesman*, has succinctly dubbed "fake fucking." Since this is as true of good movies as of bad, it means literally that we cannot sit through a serious film these days without being made voyeurs of a simulation of somebody else's sex, without becoming a thirdhand party to synthetic intimacy, without sharing a *ménage à trois* with two impersonators. This is all annoying enough, but what's worse, if possible, is that since our stupid bodies respond to these bogus sexual stimuli more readily than our clever brains, the threshold of our sexual expectations is raised without our consent and even against our will; if the rate of divorce among the long (and reasonably happily) married suddenly starts to rise, as a recent Yale study of infidelity among men thirty-five to forty-five suggests it will, these rising expectations will be a prime cause.

Books, like movies, contribute to this general malaise, and works of fiction, with their ability to concentrate *in extenso* on minute descriptions of sex, exacerbate the inadequacies of their readers and increase the dependence of those readers on a vicarious, and hence unreal, experience of sexuality. Since sex is now *de rigueur* in literary as well as admittedly pot-boiling fiction, it means that the serious reader, like the serious moviegoer, must become a voyeur in spite of himself. From another viewpoint, it makes me fear for the future of our literature, since so many otherwise able writers now modishly throw their talents away in trying to describe the indescribable. Our wisest writers have known for a long time that sex is most effectively treated by indirection, precisely because, in large doses, sexual exposition tends to engage the physiological, not the intellectual, attention of both writer and reader, and thus polarizes and distorts the fabric of the book and the intentions of the author. There is also the danger of becoming ludicrously clinical; as John Cheever remarks in *Some People, Places, & Things That Will Not Appear in My Next Novel*, "Out with this and all other explicit descriptions of sexual commerce, for how can we describe the most exalted

We helped set up Jim Collier so he could develop a profit.

When Jim Collier came to Chase's Community Economic Development Division, he was already in business. He started as an assistant to a commercial photographer. When his employer decided to move into another area of photography, Jim established himself as a free-lance photographer. His former employer rented him studio space and friends lent him some money to begin operating.

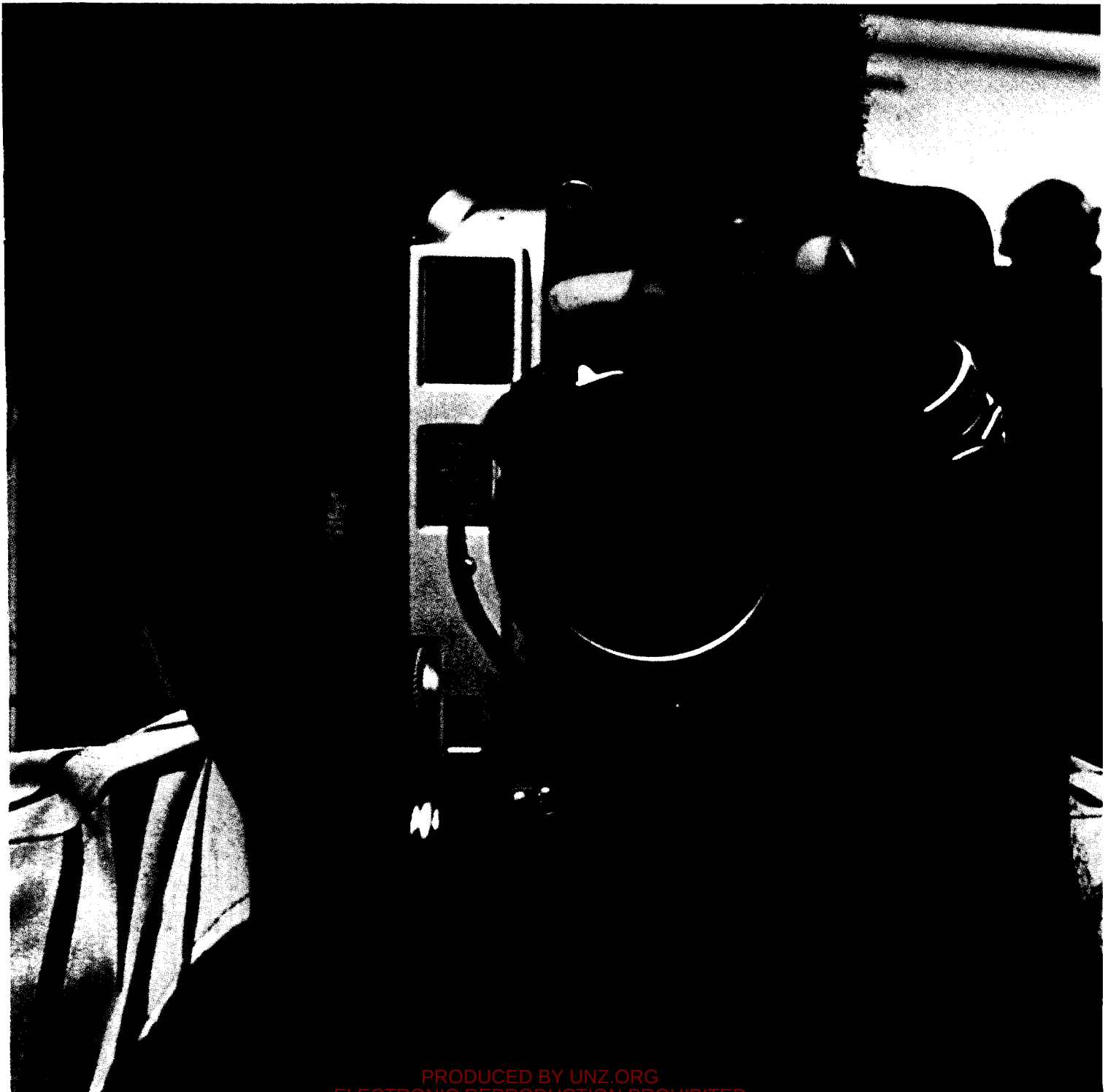
But Jim needed more money. To compete in this highly competitive field, he had to have the kind of expensive photographic equipment that would allow him to take on a variety of jobs.

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BYSTANDER

experience of our physical lives, as if—jack, wrench, hubcap, and nuts—we were describing the changing of a flat tire?” Finally, there is the peril—again, for both writer and reader—of arrested development, of dwelling eternally in naïve wonderment on the rather simple marvels of the fact that tab A does indeed fit slot B, or what Philip Larkin calls “the printed instructions of sex.” “Isn’t it time,” to quote Cheever again, “that we embraced the indiscretion and inconstancy of the flesh and moved on?”

What we move on to as consumers, though, is more printed instructions: specifically, the great spate of sex manuals loosed on our heads by publishers who get their kicks from grosser profits. Having weathered years of euphemistic explication by the old masters (or Masters) of the sex books like Dr. Theodor Van de Velde and Havelock Ellis and the leering Albert Ellis, we finally broke through to new high ground with the imported *ABZ of Love*: assorted fully illustrated compilations of positions (from which we were surprised and gratified to learn of the existence of added tabs and slots); and, latterly, *The Sensuous Man*, *The Sensuous Woman*, and *The Couple*. If you doubt that it is a degrading experience to read one of these books with serious intent, spend a half hour with *The Sensuous Woman*; it is exactly like spending half an hour in the home of a semi-literate woman of execrable taste who insists on explaining to you nonstop the provenance and price of each of her possessions. Yet tens of thousands of unfortunates who lack—or think they lack—a full experience of sexuality buy and consume such tawdry slop in the earnest hope of becoming better and more valued people.

Perhaps equally irritating—though probably far less demeaning—is the parallel trend of late toward childish scatology for its own sake in the media. Thus some late talk shows (but not Dick Cavett) would consider themselves incomplete without at least some unhousebroken bathroom references; thus every youth-oriented new movie must show the hero at a urinal or in a toilet stall; thus one William Magruder, an incredible crew-cut apparition out of the late

forties, had to certify himself as one of the boys in the otherwise adult purlieus of the Cavett show by defending his stegosaurian brainchild, the SST, with an analogy involving flies and road apples; thus the crude, inane, and boring film *There Was a Crooked Man* uses a clutch of those selfsame road apples as a clue to the direction in which the bad guy has gone. Ugh.

Our privacy, we are told, is being increasingly invaded by technology and its mechanical and human agents—computers and snoopers of various kinds. No doubt; but it is equally being invaded by the agents of so-called sexual freedom, the super-salesmen of vicarious experience who would obsess and preoccupy us with sex in exchange for our money whether we like it or not. I, for one, do not; I resent and repudiate this no-knock invasion of an intensely private and personal part of human life with which I feel perfectly capable, thank you, to cope without the interference of a plague of huckstering busybodies.

After I had written the foregoing, I came upon an article by Irving Kristol entitled “Pornography, Obscenity and The Case For Censorship,” in the *New York Times Magazine*. Mr. Kristol argues persuasively for a “liberal censorship” which would distinguish between erotic art and hard pornography; he believes, following the arguments of Walter Berns in a recent issue of *The Public Interest*, that pornography, like such outlawed entertainments as bearbaiting and cock-fighting, tends to debase and brutalize the people. He feels that “pornography differs from erotic art in that its whole purpose is to treat human beings obscenely, to deprive human beings of their specifically human dimensions.” Further, “when sex is public, the viewer does not see—cannot see—the sentiments and the ideals. He can only see the animal coupling. . . . When sex is a public spectacle, a human relationship has been debased into a mere animal connection.” Mr. Kristol also suggests that pornography and obscenity promote a kind of sexual regression, an infantile sexuality that is “not only a permanent temptation for the adolescent or even the adult—it can quite easily become a permanent, self-reinforcing neurosis.” Finally, he adds the valuable insight that, in the arts,

“Gresham’s Law can work for books or theater . . . driving out the good, establishing the debased. . . . A pornographic novel has a far better chance of being published today than a non-pornographic one, and quite a few pretty good novels are not being published at all simply because they are not pornographic.” All this leads him to the conclusion that a limited censorship is not only desirable but essential, because “civilization and humanity, nothing less” are at stake.

As I suggested at the beginning of this article, I can’t agree. Much as I sympathize with Mr. Kristol’s arguments, I can’t believe that such a censorship—apart from being a repellent measure in itself—would work much better in this country than Prohibition in the twenties or marijuana laws today. If there is an intense (and profitable) demand for pornography, there will be an immense supply, no matter how severe the penalties of the law.

No, I think we must seek extralegal redress for this infringement of our personal rights. We can do this in two ways. First, by working through consumerist means and consumer organizations to lodge a loud and continuing protest with the producers and purveyors of obscenity; these methods work, as some large corporations know. Second, those of us who are writers, teachers, community leaders, makers of opinion can bury our outmoded, liberal, laissez-faire ideas about freedom of expression at any cost—and help to cramp and cripple the mass appeal of pornography by making it *démodé*, by pointing out its kitschy insipidity, by exposing its infantilism, by laughing it to scorn.

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THE MAIL

GOODWIN ON MARCUSE

SIR: I sincerely hope your readers will turn directly to the writings of Herbert Marcuse, rather than leave off after reading Richard Goodwin's critique in the June *Atlantic*, "The Social Theory of Herbert Marcuse." While Marcuse may at times be difficult reading, in my opinion he is considerably less difficult and much less muddled than Goodwin's critique proves to be.

Many of what Goodwin calls "unexamined and highly questionable assumptions" were, I think, thoroughly examined by Marcuse in his earlier work *Eros and Civilization*—the one book to which Goodwin does not allude, and the one book that seems to be Marcuse's most significant work.

While one may not reach a firm opinion of "which side" Marcuse is on, there should be less uncertainty about where Goodwin stands: he rather clearly stands squarely with the liberal elitists, though he has begun to question—ever so gingerly—their basic assumptions.

DON W. ALLFORD
Austin, Tex.

SIR: Richard Goodwin's critique of Marcuse is just another apologetic for American liberalism—which would probably be better off without it.

Goodwin focuses on Marcuse's excesses and overlooks the all too real dilemma Marcuse illumines: if we are not governed by an enlightened elite, we are governed by an unenlightened majority.

Not that this is a new problem or one amenable to easy solution. But to gloss over it, as Goodwin has done, is intolerable. He sidesteps the fact that Vietnam has continued only through the tolerance of the majority, that

racism is a majority sentiment, and that the consumption-oriented majority in America doesn't care how much of the world's resources it wastes. Goodwin's opinion that in the long run reason will prevail fails to ameliorate the immediate—and probably immoral—impact on the victims of certain social practices perpetrated by majority ignorance. In these cases, the tyranny of the majority is no less offensive than any other tyranny.

The article would have been more useful, not to mention honest, if it had been more concerned with Marcuse's hard problems than with Goodwin's easy answers.

MIKE KOETTING
Denver, Colo.

SIR: Although most of Richard Goodwin's criticisms of Marcuse seem valid, his statements that "we have no knowledge which would allow us to translate important values into technical tasks. There is no mathematical technique for reducing vital needs and the demands of justice into a program for a computer" are simply misinformed.

Norbert Wiener foresaw the potential of computers many years ago. That computers have not been used humanely in a repressive society does not prove it can't be done in a free society.

As for Goodwin's fears that order, logic, rationality, and discipline are repressive ("For the technological mind is shaped by the necessity to repress or discard the disorderly and the irrational which are, at our present stage of knowledge, fundamental to human freedom"), these are repressive only if applied externally. Self-discipline and democratically agreed upon order are necessary for freedom, both to gain it and retain it. Can our disorderly and irrational po-

litical systems, our emotion-charged penal systems, schools that disallow self-discipline, urban-sprawl communities, and our economic system based on greed really be considered "fundamental to freedom"? It would seem to me that the disorder and illogic in our institutions do much to aid repression. They are, in fact, essential to it.

Can anyone believe that war, bigotry, pollution, and the other vicious forms of repression that exist today are the result of order and logic? Which side is Richard Goodwin on?

ANNE DAVIS
Vero Beach, Fla.

MADDOCKS ON PROUST

SIR: Though I applaud Melvin Maddocks' attempt to revive an interest in Marcel Proust ("Proust: A Prophet Remembered," in the July issue), I am led to wonder whether Mr. Maddocks has read Proust in *French*. All of the quotations are from an unidentified translation into English, and some are just plain inaccurate.

For example, Charles Swann's outcry about Odette is much more "clownish" than Proust intended, certainly. The literal translation: "... that the greatest love that I have ever known has been for a woman who did not please me, who was not in my style" is anticlimactic and gauche. What Proust really said was, "... for a woman who was alien to me, who was outside my kind of life."

Proust was, indeed, a great writer, and he needs current popularizers; but what he needs most is a contemporary English prose which does not violate his own impeccable French.

WILL C. JUMPER
Professor of English
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

SIR: I have read, with extreme pleasure and enlightenment, the 2265 pages in the Random House edition of *Remembrance of Things Past*, translated by C. K. M. Scott-Moncrieff. I have reread parts repeatedly and sections from editions in French, but the little, spiteful "homage" to Proust's birth, July 10, 1871, is a disgrace to the memory of a great artist and a great work of art.

HARROLD B. MARTIN
Philadelphia, Penn.

ADVICE AND CONSENT

SIR: A certain passage in Brutus' "Confessions of a Stockbroker" (June *Atlantic*) shows current social attitudes with particular clarity. "If women had been in the negotiations at Panmunjom, the Korean War would still be on."

This bit of nastiness does not seem to follow from Brutus' previous remarks about the nature of investment clubs. (We may disregard as impertinent his earlier remarks on the eating habits of these particular club members.) In reaching such a conclusion, Brutus reveals shaky reasoning and a reprehensible attitude toward women, for whom we discover he has hardly a good word *anywhere* in this piece.

It is poor form, these days, for an educated person to express any unkind feelings he might have toward most of the groups that have traditionally suffered the lack of full rights and privileges. Yet the publication of a Brutus' thoughts in *The Atlantic* in 1971 shows that explicit antifemale sentiment is an exceptional case. It has not yet incurred the disapproval even of those who ought to know better, but remains untouched by the social pressures that discourage many other kinds of prejudice from open expression.

KAREN FEINBERG
Cincinnati, Ohio

The Atlantic welcomes communications from its readers, but can rarely accommodate letters in excess of 500 words. Light editing, for style and economy, is the rule rather than the exception, and we assume that any letter, unless stipulated, is free for publication in our monthly letters column.

Brutus replies:

No slight to women investors was intended. The disrespect I have for most stock market players knows no color, race, creed, or sex. Karen Feinberg has obviously had a bad time with the bear market of 1969-1970. But then, everyone takes out their problems on the stockbroker. Better luck next year.

SIR: The English have many admirable qualities but "intense neighborliness" (see Anthony Lewis, "Notes on Being at Home and Abroad," June *Atlantic*) is not one of them. They are *civil*, and I can understand a New Yorker being overwhelmed by that, but they are not really very friendly. Americans (always with the exception of New Yorkers) are much more decent and generous to strangers than the English and Europeans. Also, anything is possible, but I don't believe he ever saw anyone drinking a pint of "bit-ters" in a pub.

ARTHUR CURTIS
New Orleans, La.

SIR: Re: L. E. Sissman's column "Innocent Bystander" on Charles Reich in June.

Despite the amount of time and words that Sissman spends displaying the flock of logical faults and inconsistencies he uncovers in Reich's book *The Greening of America*, the core of his condemnation lies in asserting that Reich has become one of those whom he is supposed to be teaching, that he has put himself back into adolescence at the cost of sacrificing his mature mind. Sissman makes Reich into a youth-monger who shares the grass-addled brain of youth. In that *ad hominem* vein, Sissman becomes as much a carper who delights in the alleged unauthenticity of others as Nathan Glazer claims Reich is.

Sissman maintains that the alienation of youth springs from a Freudian revolt against parents. Thus, young people's frustration becomes a psychosis to be cured not by political and social change, but by some unspecified therapy and the fact that kids do, of course, grow up. He tries to make youth revolt unreal and apolitical by relegating it to the passing twilight of mental disorder and juvenile delinquency.

Reich's most serious oversight is that he does not realize that Con-



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sciousness III will not change the given order; no matter how right the heads of all the Yalies, the fate of a West Virginia miner with black lung remains dismal. Sissman misses Reich's oversight because he shares the same assumptions. He differs only in what he calls insane. Yet Sissman comes out the worse, for not only does he dislike kids, but also somehow he finds solace in the belief that we may become the first generation of TV-zonked superconsumers. That is strange comfort indeed for a man who calls himself a poet.

BOB McNALLY
Albany, Calif.

SIR: In the note concerning the author of "The Obsolescent Mother" (May issue), you indicate that Edward Grossman traces his interest in science and its impact on society to an undergraduate course with George Wald at Harvard. As one who has also had the great privilege of having been exposed to aspects of biological knowledge in Dr. Wald's classes, I suspect that the good professor will be distressed by some of the poorly phrased sentences which Mr. Gross-

man has chosen to include in his "scenario."

For example, his statement that "parthenogenesis is undesirable because the machinery of adaptive evolution *requires* (emphasis mine) sexual reproduction" is hardly an accurate formulation of a modern biological inference. If it were, one should have to conclude that organisms reproducing asexually are incapable of taking part in the evolutionary process. And if that be so, how, then, did that process proceed (as it certainly seems to have done!) before the first sexually differentiated creatures appeared on the scene?

More important, Mr. Grossman seems to fail to understand adequately that individuals of any biological species (yes, even those individuals constituting a clone) owe their individuality not only to their genes but also to the environments in which they have their being. When Mr. Grossman writes: "A whole crowd (or clone; Greek, "a throng") of identical creatures has been bred in the laboratory, literally and predictably identical in every way to the donor frog except that some of the copies are older than others. Among other things, this shows that an individual creature, previously unique and mortal, may be rid of its uniqueness and have immortality conferred on it," he embellishes an imprecise statement of the results of the experiment with erroneous conclusions, forgetting a fact even nonbiologists are likely to know: genetically identical creatures (for example, identical twins, plants propagated vegetatively, and so on) do not lose their individuality, their "uniqueness," or, I might add, their mortality, because they happen to have identical genes. As *phenotypes*, all existent individuals, be they frogs or men, are unique as individuals because for each of them the environment in which the individual has its being is never *exactly* identical to that in which other individuals, even of the same genetic endowment, have theirs. Mr. Grossman is himself forced to reckon with this fact in the description of the results of the frog experiment, for he admits that some of the frog copies are "older" than are others.

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EDWARD WEEKS and PHOEBE ADAMS review books regularly in our columns.



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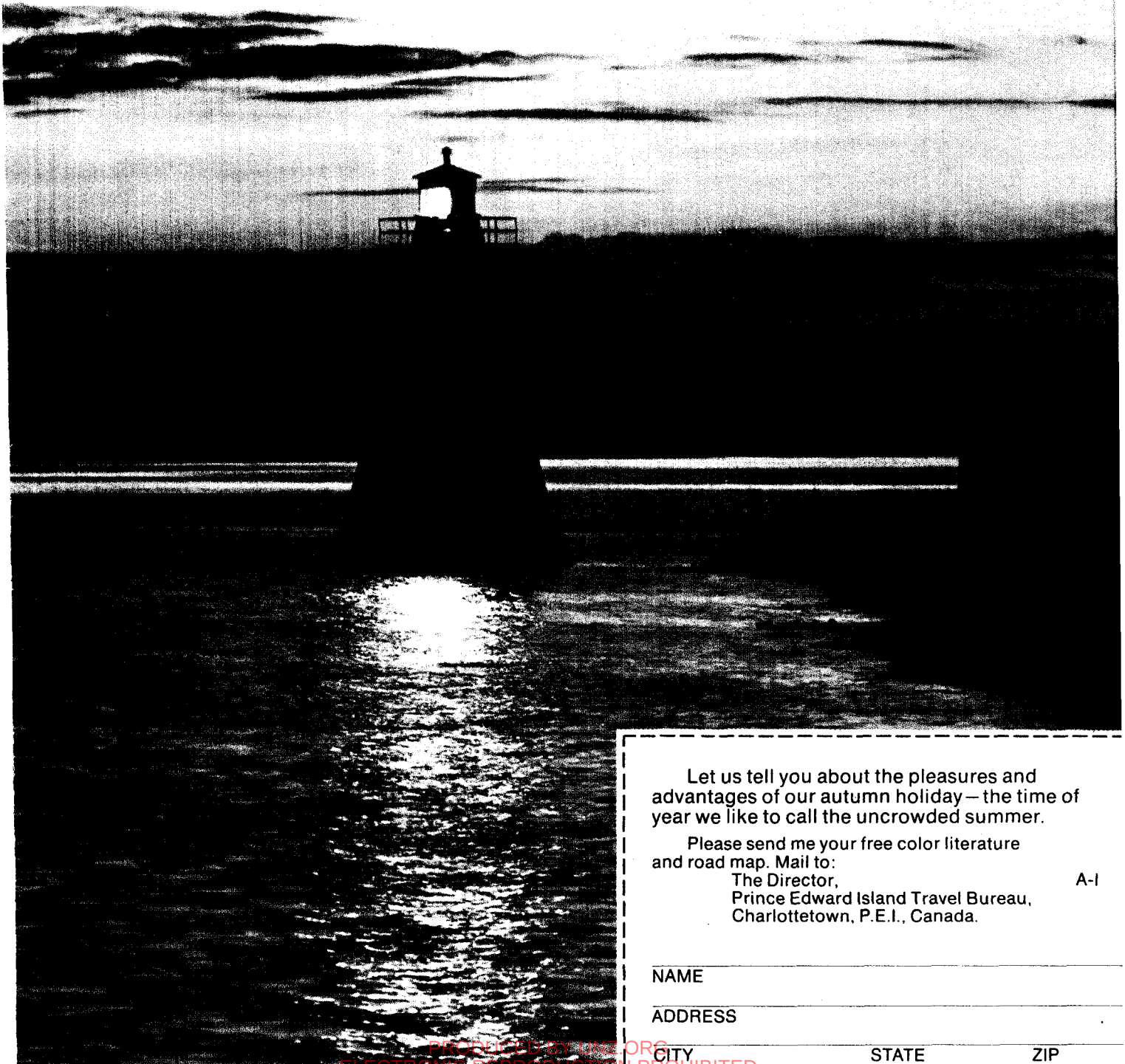
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RECOLLECTIONS OF A CULTURAL IMPERIALIST (j.g.)

by James C. Thomson, Jr.

All of us have been the tools of American cultural aggression, perhaps without being wholly conscious of it.

—Y. T. Wu, Chinese Christian leader, July, 1951

So at last it begins to happen: the reopening of China to Americans. Bizarrely, belatedly, but inevitably, a “new page” is turned in Sino-American relations.

For the *real* China Lobby within American society, this past spring has been a season of exhilaration. I speak of those scattered thousands throughout our country who once lived in China and are determined someday to return: the pre-1949 expatriates of the missionary, business, diplomatic, journalistic, and even military community, but especially their legions of sons and daughters. For twenty years now, inside and outside our government, nostalgia for a “land of lost content” has afflicted a small but persistent cluster of Americans. “Back-to-the-Mainland” is no monopoly of Chiang Kai-shek.

As one who belongs to this lobby, who spent his childhood in China and has yearned to go back, I share in the exhilaration. Yet the feeling is curiously mingled with twinges of anxiety. What will it be like? How will it feel? Will anything be the same? And will the memories be destroyed?

What memories?

What follows are some random recollections of a “cultural imperialist”—Peking’s term for foreign missionaries—but a cultural imperialist junior-grade, an infant member of the species, in pre-Communist China. I offer them as a glimpse of a fast-receding era, now that we seem on the verge of a very new one.

Among the children of American missionaries in China, there persisted before the war two social divisions—the BIC’s and the BOF’s. The BIC’s were the elite, those fortunate enough to have been born in China. The BOF’s were the rest, born on furlough when their parents returned to America for their one-year-in-seven breathers. That I was a BOF pained me except that it meant I might one day be elected President of the United States, while my BIC brother and sisters very probably could not. That provided me with one major source of security.

Otherwise, I was quite insecure. I was years younger than the rest of the family. And besides, I had missed 1927, the year in which everything had happened. Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist troops, in alliance with the Communists, had marched up from the South to overthrow the Northern warlords. My father and mother, militant pacifists at the time, had refused to budge from their Nanking home when the American Consul warned all citizens to take refuge down the Yangtze River in Shanghai. So there they sat, with three children and a grandmother; and in poured Chiang’s underfed, underclothed troops, eager to relieve foreigners of their belongings and, in a few cases, their lives. The visitors went wild for three days, and by the end of that time the Nanking Incident had taken place and I had missed it. The high point was reached when the family, looted of their last possessions, were lined up for final disposal by some trigger-happy farm boys from the South. At the last minute my father’s students saved the day by buying them off for four hundred silver dollars. The soldiers initially wanted four thousand but decided,

on closer inspection, that the price was too inflated for the particular goods in question. Eventually, the U.S. Navy came to the rescue.

But all this, as I say, was well before my time. It was not until 1933, at the age of one and a half, that I emigrated to China. And for the next seven years, China was home.

It was a splendid home, too. Not that what I came to know was really "the old China." It was rather an interim phase that had begun with the Generalissimo's accession to power in 1927. Pre-1927 Nanking was something I knew only from stories at the dinner table. These were countless, and in the course of their retelling, I came to cherish favorites among the pageant of heroes and villains that passed before my mind's eye.

One special hero was the King of the Thieves. In the old days he had reigned supreme over the city's ancient and respected guild of robbers. Each winter, on the eve of Chinese New Year, the cook would announce the arrival of the King of the Thieves, a tall, dark Northerner who then entered, bowed, and awaited his annual gift with the utmost grace and courtesy. The ten silver dollars constituted a small protection fee which kept us immune from robbery for the next twelve months. And it worked. Every once in a while a slipup might occur, and a protected household would awaken to find that the family silver had vanished in the night. But a pained protest to the King of the Thieves would always bring most of the missing loot speedily back to the doorstep, together with an explanation that some novice had pilfered the wrong house and would be sternly reprimanded. All this came to an end with the creation of the Nanking police force in the nineteen thirties. So did our immunity from thieves.

Another of my heroes was the old warlord of Nanking. He had died some years before, and his funeral had been one of the city's memorable events. Chinese funerals are always festive. This time the entire city came out in parade. First marched the zesty mourners and two brass bands playing the irrelevant pseudo-Western music of which the warlord was so fond. Then came an eight-horse hearse. The climax was five carriages of bereaved concubines, followed by a third brass band blaring forth "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

This was, incidentally, the same warlord who would periodically institute, during the years of chronic disorder, a rather ineffectual system of martial law. Our next-door neighbor, Pearl Buck (who later scandalized the missionary community by publishing a novel, divorcing her husband, marrying her publisher, and winning the Nobel Prize), was out visiting friends beyond the city walls one evening. She returned by carriage somewhat after eleven to discover the city gates closed and barred because of a new curfew. "Halt, who goes there?" shouted the sentry. "Give the password!" Mrs. Buck groped for an inspiration and called out, "Hopei!" "You fool!" said

the sentry, "that was yesterday's password. Today's is Shensi!" "Shensi," shouted Mrs. Buck. "Pass!" said the sentry. Such incidents kept me from developing too serious a concern over the dangers of Chinese militarism.

Among the villains, on the other hand, of these dinner-table legends were wild boars and wolves. Boars were there to be hunted, outside the city walls. But wolves had the habit, it seemed, of straying through the city gates unnoticed and causing a considerable commotion. Nanking, the "Southern Capital," had been the seat of the first Ming emperor and was once a great city. But the Taipings had wrought terrible havoc there during their curious mid-nineteenth-century rebellion, and afterwards it was reduced to a sleepy provincial town. It retained certain marks of imperial grandeur—among them its impressive walls, seventy feet high, twenty-six miles long, and wide enough on top for two small cars to pass. Much of the area within the walls was now rural, and wolf hunts could be good sport even inside the city limits. It was in the twenties, too, that my father used to go hunting for wild boars in the eroded and beautifully treeless countryside beyond the walls. But the boars seem to have emigrated with the coming of Chiang's armies, so my father was left to hunt deer until the day he shot a doe who looked like my sister Nancy, at which point he put away his gun and turned to photography.

But this is not to say that the impact of China was communicated to me over the dining room table. Far from it. China was all around me—its sounds, its smells, its colors—beyond the protection of the walls which enclosed our Western-style brick house, our servants' quarters, and our garden with its camphor, pomegranate, fig, and persimmon trees. Sometimes China even sneaked inside the walls.

My father was a professor of chemistry at the mission-sponsored University of Nanking. My mother taught school for the older missionary children. They had originally journeyed to China in 1917 as embodiments of confused ecumenism. My father was Dutch Reformed, my mother Episcopalian; they had been dispatched to China by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to take the place of a Methodist at an interdenominational university and had occupied a house owned by the Disciples of Christ. For a while, in their first year, no one would pay their salary. But all this was past history by the time I came along. From the beginning I was certain that the true road to salvation lay through Presbyterianism, especially since the Presbyterian Board was now footing the bill. As for my father's employment, I knew he could do wondrous things in an exciting place called his "laboratory"—like grinding wheat for our porridge, peanuts for our peanut butter, and brewing buttermilk by the vat. Other than this, I was reasonably impervious to

Recollections of a Cultural Imperialist (j.g.)

the missionary enterprise and was left to my own devices.

These devices brought me into contact with the second most important woman in my life, namely Ch'u Sao-tzu the amah. Ch'u Sao-tzu had previously belonged to famous Pearl Buck and considered her present employment, I think, a distinct step downward on the social ladder. She was the most strong-willed female I have ever known, swore with eloquence rare even among the Chinese, chased the male servants with hot irons when her ire was aroused, and kept her poor husband, Li-hua the cook, in a state of lamblike docility. It had taken a steely hand to catch Li-hua, and Ch'u Sao-tzu had not been averse to using it. Shortly before his announcement of his desire to marry her, Li-hua had been locked in the cellar for three days by his lady, unbeknownst to the household. Many years later a childless Ch'u Sao-tzu decided it was high time she should have some heirs. So she found Li-hua a second wife, got them married, and expropriated the eventual offspring of this union.

Extraordinarily independent of mind, Ch'u Sao-tzu was highly adaptable of spirit. Some years before, a good missionary had brought her into the arms of Christianity, and she was a confirmed and reasonably faithful member of the Chung Hua Shen Kung Hui, or Chinese Episcopal Church. At least twice a year, too, she would burn incense to her ancestors to assure good luck. Now and then she would visit the local Buddhist temple and purchase a prayer stick or two. She always stopped to pay her respects to the little images in Taoist shrines along the roads in the countryside. And to the extent that her unbridled spirit would permit, she honored the precepts of the Sage Confucius in her human relationships. Ch'u Sao-tzu was a formidable example of the obstacles facing Christian evangelism in China. She was imbued with a wholesome disregard for metaphysics, a zestful concern for the here and now, and a boundless capacity for absorbing such trivia as credos and forms of worship.

It was through Ch'u Sao-tzu that I first knew the China beyond our brick-wall frontier. It was she who used to lift me over to the amah next door, an amiable soul well stocked with such delights as spiced dumplings and, on special occasions, almond-paste "moon cakes." It was Ch'u Sao-tzu who would let me sample, on the sly, the forbidden wares of the street vendors—fried breads and spun sweets. It was Ch'u Sao-tzu who taught me songs and poems of an earthier nature than those I learned in school. And it was she who would tend me when I was ill, taking special care, in accordance with my mother's instructions, to sterilize the thermometer in alcohol—after which she would lick it off just to make sure it was clean.

In fact, it was from Ch'u Sao-tzu that I derived my early skepticism about sanitation, and about germs in general. My father was to germs very much what

Joseph McCarthy was to American Communists; he saw them everywhere and pursued them ferociously. But from Ch'u Sao-tzu I learned that all this was an example of Western superstition; the Chinese were above such things, but tolerated the foreigners' eccentricity in this regard, as they did in most others. Sometimes her attitude used to worry my mother. And on one memorable occasion the missionary community decided to have a showing of a documentary film on the menace of flies for the enlightenment of all the local servants. It was one of those awesome things in which the fly is magnified several hundred times to show its full filth and really looks appalling. Afterwards it was Ch'u Sao-tzu who voiced the audience's sense of revelation. "Oh, T'ang Sze-mu!" she exclaimed to my mother, in Chinese, "I see why you have always made such a fuss about flies, since flies are so very large in your country. But you must not worry. You see, our Chinese flies are really tiny little harmless things."

Teaching Ch'u Sao-tzu Western sanitation was just about as difficult as teaching the local carpenter to accustom himself to Western designs for furniture. My father once wanted a special desk built for his laboratory, so he called in this craftsman, chatted with him; and made a perspective drawing of the completed piece. The carpenter reluctantly agreed that it might be possible to produce such a desk, and came back in a week with the finished product. It was a very curious desk; the top was in the shape of a tired parallelogram, while the rear legs were shorter than the front legs. He had followed the drawing exactly—and had constructed the desk itself in perspective.

When I was old enough to embark upon education, it was Ch'u Sao-tzu who escorted me to Chinese kindergarten. And Chinese kindergarten was a joy. Getting there involved one obstacle. Each day my route led me past the same genial policeman, and each day he would ask me my name and roar with mirth when I replied. It seems that the Chinese phonetic equivalent of my name, Jimmy, or "Chi-mi," a name bestowed upon me inadvertently by my mother, had the literal meaning "Chicken Feed," a term which unfortunately connotes no greater virility in Chinese than in English. But Chi-mi I remained, and to kindergarten I toddled daily. There I learned to salute the Chinese flag, to sing the Chinese national anthem, and to bow three times before the portrait of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. I learned, in short, to be a useful Chinese citizen. But I was not as great a success as my brother had been before me, for he had come home from the all-Chinese school one day, to my mother's rather mixed pleasure, with a prize for being the second-cleanest boy in the class. Anyway, after several months of this, my parents decided that it was time to train me in my cultural heritage. And so I was dispatched to an Anglo-American Quaker kindergarten. It was here that I got religion, so to speak; and that was useful, too.

In the first place, it gave me and a small female friend a stimulus to play endless sessions of a game which must be the missionary equivalent of "House"—except that instead of taking turns being Mama and Papa, we played, as I remember, a totally asexual and Presbyterian variety in which we took turns being God and Jesus. This tended to produce fierce altercations as to who had played which role longer, though I do not recall who took precedence in our hierarchy. It was also at Quaker kindergarten that I learned to pray. This skill found special use in my continued and inconclusive battle against the carrot, a vegetable I abhorred. My greatest triumph came the day I went into the kitchen with a large black book under my arm and asked the cook and amah to join with me in a prayer meeting. This they reverently did, bowing their heads while I called upon the deity generally to preserve us from carrots and, in particular, to keep the cook from buying or preparing them ever again. The ceremony had its effect, I discovered, as Li-hua felt it would shake my youthful belief in God were he to disobey my wishes on the subject. So carrots disappeared from the menu for several months until my mother complained and learned the story. It seems she had less regard for the tenderness of my faith.

Kindergartens aside, Nanking was a lively place in the thirties. The years from 1928 to 1937 were an interval of promise as well as upheaval. The Kuomintang government, whatever its shortcomings, was infused with a good deal of youth, vigor, and idealism. It mapped out some of the most ambitious programs of modernization the country had ever known. Nanking was the hub of the new order, and there one could feel the quickening pulse of the land.

Most of this, of course, passed me by. But I do clearly recall the Generalissimo's curious plan for national regeneration along neo-Confucian principles, something called the "New Life Movement"—which, I must confess, darkly fascinated me for some time, as I was convinced that it had something to do with the excretory process. Had I been less of a prude, I should have raised the point with my parents. But prude I was, which fact indicates a staggering victory for Presbyterianism in the wilds of Asia, as there is nothing to which life in China is less conducive than prudery. A country in which the fields are periodically draped in night soil is not a country where one learns to be finicky about the more private bodily functions as in our overcivilized West. Men and women tended to relieve themselves without self-consciousness or concealment. The only problem was that Chinese children and even some less circumspect adults seemed to place a premium on the value of observing a foreigner so performing. In later years I was to become quite blasé about the large and genuinely curious crowds which would gather

around the open outhouses of country inns where I happened to be spending a night. Among Chinese children I am convinced that there exists a game whose title, roughly translated, reads: "Catch-the-foreign-devil-going-pee-pee."

It should be mentioned that one thing to which Westerners in China did have to accustom themselves speedily was the fact of living in a zoo—but not on the spectator side of the bars. As big-nosed, pink-faced people, we were excruciatingly funny to observe, and in the course of the years, our entertainment value was immense, if at all else we failed. As foreigners we gathered swarms of spectators wherever we went outside such cosmopolitan and sophisticated centers as Shanghai and Hong Kong. We were funny when walking, we were comical when eating, and we were downright ludicrous when taking pictures, reading books, or writing letters. In later years I was often to collect crowds of as many as thirty people in the course of changing a single camera film. Once, long afterwards, in postwar West China, a friend and I overnighted in a town which had not seen a foreigner in six years and inadvertently led a parade of five hundred screaming children through the streets in desperate search of anonymity and the small, elusive inn where we had left our baggage.

Not that this particularly bothered me in the thirties. I was universally addressed by street urchins as "*hsiao yang kuei-tzu*," or "little foreign devil," but came to regard it as almost a term of endearment. Even "*ta-pi*," or "big-nose," seemed rather mild, especially in the face of such spicier epithets as "big turnip" and "turtle's egg." Chinese swearing was colorful, if less than overwhelming in translation. And the zoolike aspects of life in China were often diverting for a child.

And so the thirties passed, filled with the songs of street vendors and mountain carriers, with misty landscapes and soft red temples, with pagoda roofs and the smells of the Chinese alley. It was in the summer of 1937, while we played in the Lushan mountains at Kuling, that a second Nanking Incident occurred with the Japanese occupation of that city; and once again I missed the excitement. For a few months we remained refugees in our mountain fastness as the Sino-Japanese war snapped and crackled to the north of us. And then, on New Year's Day, we walked down Kuling's 3000 steps to the international train which whisked us south to Hong Kong, a city memorable chiefly for our refugee camp cots in the cavernous dining salon of the Peninsular Hotel. Next came Shanghai, an international enclave where we could park ourselves peacefully for two more years on the campus of the Shanghai American School. Shanghai I remember for the world's most comfortable rickshaws, for double-decker buses, chocolate shops, White Russian cafés, and the Jessfield Zoo's most cheerful inmate, one "Jimmy the Giant Kangaroo." The implications of this sizable advance over

the days of Chicken Feed were not lost on me. Shanghai was cosmopolitan in the extreme and a very gay place; but it was not really China. Only once did we return to Nanking, a curiously dead, gray city now in the spring of 1938.

But then came furlough time at last. By late 1939 I was on my way to the country I had never known, a paradise so clean, I was assured, that you could pick pennies off the street and pop them quite safely into your mouth.

It was nine years before I returned to China, and the China to which I returned was a rather different one. Many of the differences lay in me, for I was seeing the country through seventeen-year-old eyes. The hazy, happy memories still lingered, and they snapped into clear focus as I revisited old scenes and relived old experiences. But scenes and experiences assumed new significance, for my arrival coincided with the collapse of the regime and the way of life we had known so well in Nanking.

I traveled to China in July, 1948, with a classmate (Winthrop Knowlton, now president of Harper & Row, publishers) who was joining me for a year abroad between school and college. In the summer months we wandered in the North around Peking, the Great Wall, and Inner Mongolia, then to central China up the Yangtze River in the mountains of the Lushan range once again. In September we enrolled in Nanking University and settled down for nine months of prewar domesticity. It turned out to be a bare two and a half months. By December the Communist armies were poised a few miles above Nanking, and my parents were moving to South China. The two of us bade farewell to things academic. This was our last chance, we said; so we armed ourselves with DDT, bedding rolls, and a sense of urgency. And we took off for four months of travel through the West and Southwest. They were months which brought us to the heart of the China that lies far behind the Eastern seaboard. Meanwhile, the walls were crumbling about us.

China was a curious place in this period of turnover. During our last weeks in Nanking enormous armies were convulsed in the greatest battle of Chinese history at Hsuechow, forty miles to the north of us. But all was deceptively serene in the city itself. Elsewhere in West China, later in the year, we had stepped back a thousand years to a land in which the war a few hundred miles away had no effect on the ancient rhythm of sowing and harvesting, of giving birth and dying. The tranquil past one found in West China was as nothing I have ever known. This was the China that had vexed a score of conquerors; the glacial China that lumbered on relentlessly in its peaceful and massive way, engulfing, quelling, absorbing.

It was in the West, too, that I came to know the reality of the unchanging Chinese spirit. We traveled a

great deal as "yellow fish"—illegal paying hitchhikers—on the tops of antique postal buses and trucks, clinging to the sides of mailbags, market baskets, and freshly butchered hogs. We stopped for meals and lodgings in towns, remote villages, and sometimes Buddhist monasteries. Our fellow "fish" were provincial businessmen and farmers moving from town to town. They gaped at us, they guffawed at us. (China was still a zoo.) But almost never were we able to pay for a night's lodging, almost never for a meal. Whenever we asked for the bill in the small mud-floor lamplit restaurant, the proprietor would reply that a gentleman at another table had already paid for us. Invariably this would be one of our fellow wayfarers, a countryman whose Confucian ethic had long ago taught him to show kindness to the stranger traveling through his land. We tried to repay by distributing peanuts and tangerines to the others during the ride. In the midst of misery they could be the most gracious and generous people on earth.

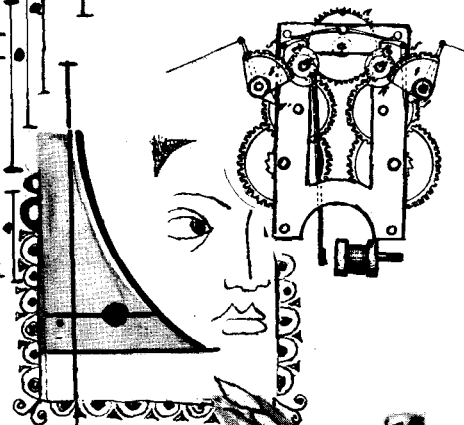
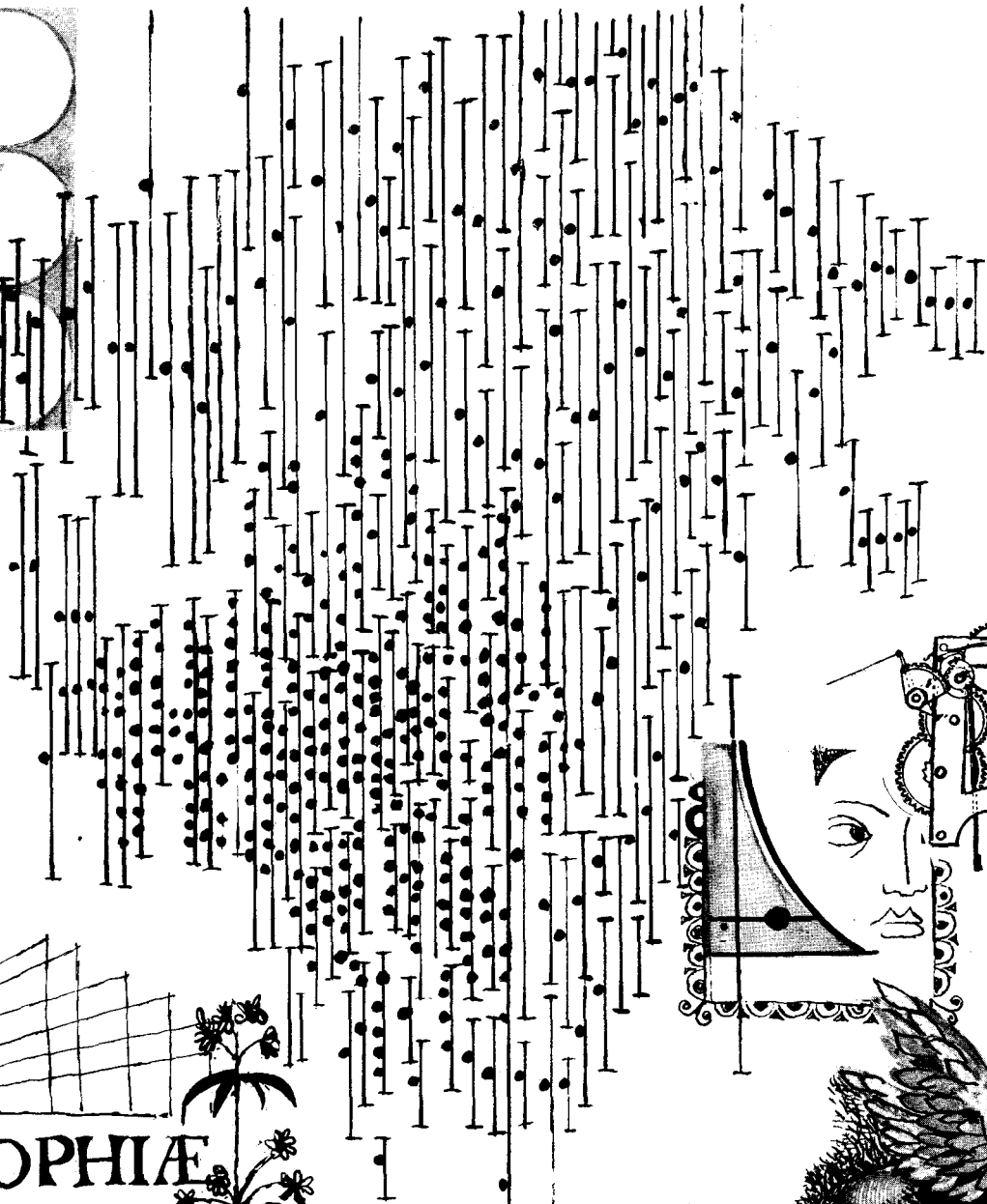
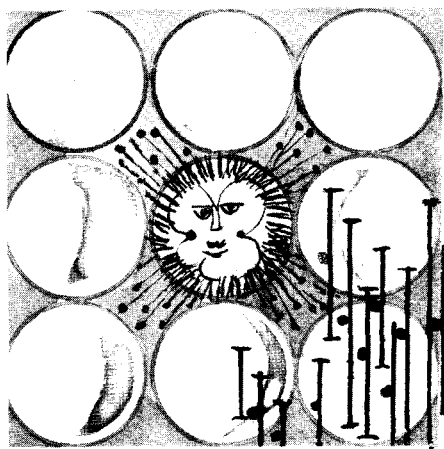
West China was an eye-opener in other ways. It instructed me further in the nature of Chinese governance. Here, after nearly forty years of nominal republican rule, the central government maintained control only through a careful network of alliances with powerful local warlords who still retained private armies.

And here it was that we encountered age-old symptoms of disorder best illustrated in the dilemma we confronted in February, 1949, when we reached Kweiyang in the Southwest on our trek back to the Coast. We had to choose, then, between a motor route southward, which was officially closed because bandits had seized a large portion of the road, and a river route southeastward, which was officially closed because pirates had seized a large portion of the river. As it was, we elected to try our luck with a narrow-gauge railway leading eastward which had been built in strips but never connected. The procedure was to journey in trucks by day, meet the railroad by nightfall, and meander through the darkness in plush prewar wagons-lits. Why had the rail sections never been linked? Because the local general had deduced from history that The Enemy always marched up completed railroads, so it would be best to construct only incomplete railroads.

And why, we asked one night, as we chugged along at two miles per hour, did the trains run so slowly? Oh, said the conductor, because if the train went any faster, the locomotive usually jumped the track. But, he added, there was one other problem: when the train ran slowly, bandits would walk aboard, rob all the passengers, and walk off again. It was a hard life, he sighed.

Were we imperialists? I suppose so—though judging by the outcome we were less than a success. And if anyone changed anyone, they changed us.

All I know is that I cried when I heard those first sounds from Peking on the television last spring. □



PHILOSOPHIAE
NATURALIS
PRINCIPIA
MATHEMATICA

*Autore JS. NEWTON, Trin. Coll. Cantab. Soc. Mat.
Professore Lucasiana, & Societatis Regalis Sodali.*

IMPRIMATUR
S. PEPYS, Reg. Soc. PRÆF.
Julii 5. 1686.



A FUTURE LITERACY

by George Steiner

Thoughts on "languages outside the word."

Changes of idiom between generations are a normal part of social history. Previously, however, such changes and the verbal provocations of young against old have been variants on an evolutionary continuum. What is occurring now is new: it is an attempt at a total break. The mumble of the dropout, the silence of the teen-ager in the enemy house of his parents, are meant to destroy. Cordelia's asceticism, her refusal of the mendacities of speech, proves murderous. So does that of the autistic child, when it stamps on language, pulverizing it to gibberish or maniacal silence. We empty of their humanity those to whom we deny speech. We make them naked and absurd. There is a terrible, literal image in "stone-deafness," in the opaque babble or speechlessness of the "stoned." Break off speech to others, and the Medusa turns inward. Hence something of the hurt and despair of the present conflict between generations. Deliberate violence is being done to those primary ties of identity and social cohesion produced by a common language.

But are there no other literacies conceivable, "literacies" not of the letter?

I am writing in a study in a college of one of the great American universities. The walls are throbbing gently to the beat of music coming from one near

and several more distant amplifiers. The walls quiver to the ear or to the touch roughly eighteen hours a day, sometimes twenty-four. The beat is literally unending. It matters little whether it is that of pop, folk, or rock. What counts is the all-pervasive pulsation, morning to night and into night, made indiscriminate by the cool burn of electronic timbre. A large segment of mankind, between the ages of thirteen and, say, twenty-five, now lives immersed in this constant throb. The hammering of rock or of pop creates an enveloping space. Activities such as reading, writing, private communication, learning, previously framed with silence, now take place in a field of strident vibrato. This means that the essentially linguistic nature of these pursuits is adulterated; they are vestigial modes of the old "logic."

Yet we are unquestionably dealing with a literacy, with codes of recognition so widespread and dynamic that they constitute a "meta-culture." Popular musics have their semantics, their theory of genres, their intricate play-offs of esoteric against canonic types. Folk and pop, "trad music" and rock, count their several histories and corpus of legend. They show their relics. They number their old masters and rebels, their betrayers and high priests. Precisely as in classical literacy, so there are in the world of jazz or of rock'n'roll degrees of initiation ranging from the vague empathies of the tyro (Latin on sundials) to the acid erudition of the scholiast. At the same time

there is an age factor which makes the culture of pop more like modern mathematics and physics than the humanities. In their execution of and response to popular music, the young have a tension-span, a suppleness of appropriation denied to the old. Part of the reason may be a straightforward organic degeneracy: the delicate receptors of the inner ear harden and grow opaque during one's twenties.

In short, the vocabularies, the contextual behavior-patterns of pop and rock, constitute a genuine *lingua franca*, a "universal dialect" of youth. Everywhere a sound-culture seems to be driving back the old authority of verbal order.

If music is one of the principal "languages outside the word," mathematics is another. Any argument on a postclassic culture and on future literacy will have to address itself, decisively, to the role of the mathematical and natural sciences. Theirs may very soon be the central sphere. Statistics can be shallow or ambiguous in interpretation. But those which tabulate the growth of the sciences do, in plain fact, map a new world. More than 90 percent of all scientists known to human record are now living. The number of papers which may be regarded as relevant to an advance in chemistry, physics, and the biological sciences—that is, the recent, active literature in these three fields alone—is estimated as being in excess of three and a quarter million. The critical indices in the sciences—investment, publication, number of men trained, percentage of the gross national product directly implicated in research and development—are doubling every seven to ten years. Between now and 1990, according to a recent projection, the number of monographs published in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology will, if aligned on an imaginary shelf, stretch to the moon.

Less tangibly, but more significantly, it has been estimated that some 75 percent of the most talented individuals in the developed nations, of the men and women whose measurable intelligence comes near the top of the curve in the community, now work in the sciences. Politics and the humanities thus seem to draw on a quarter of the optimal mental resources in our societies, and recruit largely from below the line of excellence. It is almost a platitude to insist that no previous period in history offers any parallel to the current exponential growth in the rate, multiplicity, and effects of scientific-technological advance. It is equally obvious that even the present fantastic pace (interleaved, as it may be, by phases of disillusion or regrouping in certain highly developed nations) will at least double by the early 1980s. This phenomenology brings with it wholly unprecedented demands on information absorption and rational application. We stand less on that shore of the unbounded which awed Newton than amid tidal movements for which there is not even a theoretic model.

One can identify half a dozen areas of maximal

pressure, points at which pure science and technological realization will alter basic structures of both private and social life.

There is the galaxy of biomedical "engineering." Spare-part surgery, the use of chemical agencies against the degeneration of aging tissues, pre-selection of the sex of the embryo, the manipulation of genetic factors toward ethical or strategic ends—each of these literally prepares a new typology of man. So does the direct chemical or electrochemical control of behavior. By implanting electrodes in the brain, by giving personality-control drugs, the therapist will be able to program alterations of consciousness; he will touch on the electrochemistry of motive to determine the deed. Memory transfer through biochemical transplant, for which controversial claims are now being made, would alter the essential relations of ego and time. Unquestionably, our current inroads on the human cortex dwarf all previous images of exploration.

The revolutions of awareness that will result from full-scale computerization and electronic data processing can only be crudely guessed at. At some point in 1969, the information-handling capacity of computers—that is, the number of units of information which can be received and stored—surpassed that of the 3.5 billion brains belonging to the human race. By 1975, computers will be leading by a fifty-to-one ratio. By whatever criterion used, size of memory, cost, speed and accuracy of calculation, computers are now increasing a thousandfold every fifteen years. In advanced societies, the electronic data bank is becoming the pivot of military, economic, sociological, and archival procedures. Though a computer is a tool, its powers are such that they go far beyond the model of governed, easily limited instrumentality. Analogue and digital computerization are transforming the relations of density, of authority, between the human intellect and available knowledge, between personal choice and projected possibility. Connected to telephone lines or to more sophisticated arteries of transmission, multipurpose computers will become a routine presence in all offices and most homes. It is probable that this electronic cortex will simultaneously reduce the singularity of the individual and immensely enlarge his referential and operational scope. Inevitably, the mathematical issues of electronic storage and information-retrieval are becoming the focus of the study of mind.

Another main area is that of large-scale ecological modification. There is a good deal of millenarian naïveté and recoil from adult politics in the current passion for the environment. Nevertheless, the potentialities are formidable. Control of weather, locally at least, is now conceivable, as is the economic exploitation of the continental shelves and of the deeper parts of the sea. Man's setting or "collective skin" is becoming malleable on a scale previously unimaginable. Beyond these fields lies space explo-

ration. Momentary boredom with the smooth histrionics of the thing ought not to blur two crucial eventualities: the establishment of habitable bases outside a polluted, overcrowded, or war-torn earth, and, remote as it now seems, the perception of signals from other systems of intelligence or information. Fontenelle's inspired speculations of 1686 *Sur la pluralité des mondes* are now a statistical commonplace.

We cannot hope to measure the sum and consequence of these developments. Yet all but the last-mentioned are in definite sight. That not one of these exploding horizons should even have appeared in T. S. Eliot's *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* indicates the pace of mutation since 1948 when that book appeared. Our ethics, our central habits of consciousness, the immediate and environmental membrane we inhabit, our relations to age and to remembrance, to the children whom we may select and program, are being transformed. As in the twilight times of Ovid's fables of mutant being, we are in metamorphosis. To be ignorant of these scientific and technological phenomena, to be indifferent to their effects on our mental and physical experience, *is to opt out of reason*. A view of postclassic civilization must, increasingly, imply a vision of the sciences, of the language-worlds of mathematical and symbolic notation. Theirs is the commanding energy: in material fact, in the "forward dreams" which define us. Today, our dialectics are binary.

But the motives for trying to incorporate science into the field of common reference, of imaginative reflex, are better than utilitarian. And this is so even if we take "utilitarian," as we must, to include our very survival as a species. The true motives ought to be those of delight, of intellectual energy, of moral venture. To have some personal *rapport* with the sciences is, very probably, to be in contact with that which has the most force of life and comeliness in our reduced condition.

At seminal levels of metaphor, of myth, of laughter, where the arts and the worn scaffolding of philosophic systems fail us, science is active. Touch on even its more abstruse regions and a deep elegance, a quickness and merriment of the spirit come through. Consider the Banach-Tarski theorem whereby the sun and a pea may be so divided into a finite number of disjointed parts that every single part of one is congruent to a unique part of the other. The undoubted result is that the sun may be fitted into one's vest pocket, and that the component parts of the pea will fill the entire universe solidly, no vacant space remaining either in the interior of the pea or in the universe. What surrealist fantasy yields a more precise wonder? Or take the Penrose theorem in cosmology which tells us that under extreme conditions of gravitational collapse a critical stage is reached whereby no communication with the outside world is

possible. Light cannot escape the gravitational field. A "black hole" develops representing the locale of a body of near-zero volume and near-infinite density. Or, even more remarkable, the "collapse-event" may open "into" a new universe hitherto unapprehended. Here spin the *soleils noirs* of Nerval and romantic trance. But the marvelous wit is that of fact. Very recent observations of at least two bodies, a companion to the star Aur and the supergiant star Her 89, suggest that Penrose's model of a "hole in space" is true. "Constantly, I seek a poetry of facts," writes Hugh MacDiarmid:

Even as

The profound kinship of all living substance
Is made clear by the chemical route.
Without some chemistry one is bound to remain
Forever a dumbfounded savage
In the face of vital reactions.
The beautiful relations
Shown only by biochemistry
Replace a stupefied sense of wonder
With something more wonderful
Because natural and understandable.

That "poetry of facts" and realization of the miraculous delicacies of perception in contemporary science already inform literature at those nervepoints where it is both disciplined and under the stress of the future. It is no accident that Musil was trained as an engineer, that Ernst Jünger and Nabokov should be serious entomologists, that Broch and Canetti are writers schooled in the exact and mathematical sciences. The special, deepening presence of Valéry in one's feelings about the afterlife of culture is inseparable from his own alertness to the alternative poetics, to the "other metaphysics" of mathematical and scientific pursuit. The instigations of Queneau and of Borges, which are among the most bracing in modern letters, have algebra and astronomy at their back. And there is a more spacious, central instance. Proust's only successor is Joseph Needham. By that I mean something entirely concrete. *A La Recherche du temps perdu* and *Science and Civilization in China* represent two uncannily sustained, controlled flights of the re-creative intellect. They exhibit what Coleridge termed "esemplastic powers," that many-branched coherence of design which builds a great house of language for memory and conjecture to inhabit. The China of Needham's passionate recomposing—so inwardly shaped before he went in search of its material truth—is a place as intricate, as lit by dreams, as the way to Combray. Needham's account, in an "interim" essay, of the misreadings and final discovery of the true hexagonal symmetry of the snow crystal has the same exact savor of manifold revealing as the Narrator's sightings of the steeple at Martinville. Both works are a long danse of the mind.

It is often objected that the layman cannot share in the life of the sciences. He is "bound to remain forever a dumbfounded savage" before a world whose primary idiom he cannot grasp. Though good scien-

tists themselves rarely say this, it is obviously true. But only to a degree. Modern science is centrally mathematical; the development of rigorous mathematical formalization marks the evolution of a given discipline, such as biology, to full scientific maturity. Having no mathematics, or very little, the "common reader" is excluded. If he tries to penetrate the meaning of a scientific argument, he will probably get it muddled, or misconstrue metaphor to signify the actual process. True again, but of a truth that is halfway to indolence. Even a modest mathematical culture will allow some approach to what is going on. The notion that one can exercise a rational literacy in the latter part of the twentieth century without a knowledge of calculus, without some preliminary access to topology or algebraic analysis, will soon seem a bizarre archaicism. These styles and speech-forms from the grammar of number are already indispensable to many branches of modern logic, philosophy, linguistics, and psychology. They are the language of feeling where it is, today, most adventurous. As electronic data-processing and coding pervade more and more of the economics and social order of our lives, the mathematical illiterate will find himself cut off. A new hierarchy of menial service and stunted opportunity may develop among those whose resources continue to be purely verbal. There may be "word-helots."

Of course, the mathematical literacy of the amateur must remain modest. Usually he will apprehend only a part of the scientific innovation, catching a momentary, uncertain glimpse of a continuum, making an approximate image for himself. But is this not, in fact, the way in which we view a good deal of modern art? Is it not precisely through intervals of selective appropriation, via pictorial analogies which are often naïve in the extreme, that the nonmusician assimilates the complex, ultimately technical realities of music?

The history of science, moreover, permits of a less demanding access, yet one that leads to the center. A modest mathematical culture is almost sufficient to enable one to follow the development of celestial mechanics and of the theory of motion until Newton and Laplace. It takes no more than reasonable effort to understand, at least along major lines, the scruple, the elegance of hypothesis and experiment which characterize the modulations of the concept of entropy from Carnot to Helmholtz. The genesis of Darwinism and the subsequent re-examinations which lead from orthodox evolutionary doctrine to modern molecular biology are one of the "very rich hours" of the human intellect. Yet much of the material, and many of its philosophical implications, are accessible to the layman. This is so, to a lesser degree, of some part of the debate between Einstein, Bohr, Wolfgang Pauli, and Max Born—from each of whom we have letters of matchless honesty and personal commitment—on the issue of anarchic indeterminacy or subjective interference in quantum physics. Here are

topics as crowded with felt life as any in the humanities.

The absence of the history of science and technology from the school syllabus is a scandal. It is an absurdity to speak of the Renaissance without knowledge of its cosmology, of the mathematical dreams which underwrote its theories of art and music. To read seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature or philosophy without an accompanying awareness of the unfolding genius of physics, astronomy, and algebraic analysis during this period is to read only at the surface. A model of neo-classicism which omits Linnaeus is hollow. What can be said responsibly of romantic historicism, of the new mappings of time after Hegel, which fails to include a study of Buffon, Cuvier, and Lamarck? It is not only that the humanities have been arrogant in their assertions of centrality; it is that they have often been silly. We need no poet more urgently than Lucretius.

Where culture itself is so utterly fragmented, there is no need to speak of the sciences as separate. What does make them so different from the present state of the humanities is their collectivity and inner calendar. Overwhelmingly, today, science is a collective enterprise in which the talent of the individual is a function of the group. But, as we have seen, more and more of current radical art and anti-art aspires to the same plurality. The deep divergence between the humanistic and scientific sensibilities is one of temporality. Very nearly by definition, the scientist knows that tomorrow will be in advance of today. A twentieth-century schoolboy can manipulate mathematical and experiential concepts inaccessible to a Galileo or a Gauss. For a scientist the curve of time is positive. Inevitably, the humanist looks back. The essential repertoire of his consciousness, the props of his daily life as a scholar or critic, are from the past. A natural bent of feeling will lead him to believe, perhaps silently, that the achievements of the past are more radiant than those of his own age. The proposition that "Shakespeare is the greatest, most complete writer" mankind will ever produce is a logical and almost a grammatical outrage. But it carries conviction. And even if a Rembrandt or a Mozart may, in future, be equaled (itself a gross, indistinct notion), they cannot be surpassed. There is a profound logic of sequent energy in the arts, but not an additive progress in the sense of the sciences. No errors are corrected or theorems disproved. Because it carries the past within it, language, unlike mathematics, draws backward. This is the meaning of Eurydice. Because the realness of his inward being lies at his back, the man of words, the singer, will turn to the place of necessary shadows. For the scientist, time and the light lie before.

Here, if anywhere, lies the division of the "two cultures" or, rather, of the two orientations. Anyone who has lived among scientists will know how intensely this polarity influences life-style. Their evenings point to tomorrow, *e santo è l'avvenire*. □

WELFARE:

The best of intentions, the worst of results

by Irving Kristol

In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville submitted an *Essay on Pauperism* to the Royal Academic Society of Cherbourg. The *Essay* addressed itself to a striking contemporary paradox: why, in the most "opulent" (we would say, more timidly, "affluent") nation in the world—that is, England—was there such an extraordinary problem of "pauperism" (what we would now call "welfare": poor people on poor relief)? In France and Spain and Portugal, he pointed out, the people were all much poorer than in England; and the average Spaniard was poor even in comparison with the English pauper on poor relief. But in none of these poorer countries was there a "pauper problem" of the kind that agitated English society and English politics. How could one account for that "apparently inexplicable" phenomenon?

"Enough"

Tocqueville's answer was twofold. First, urbanization and industrialization made the poor more dependent on public charity for a min-

imum level of subsistence. In an agrarian economy, it was only in rare periods of famine that the poorest rural laborer could not get enough to eat—"enough" meaning here simply a diet that would avert starvation. In contrast, the poor in a modern city have no such normal, minimum guarantee; they are therefore in frequent need of public assistance, if they are to keep body and soul together.

Second, in an "opulent" society, the idea of poverty itself undergoes a continual redefinition. The poor experience not only the need for a guaranteed minimum; they also suffer from what a modern sociologist would call "relative deprivation." Tocqueville puts the matter this way:

"Among civilized peoples, the lack of a multitude of things causes poverty. . . . In a country where the majority is ill-clothed, ill-housed, ill-fed, who thinks of giving clean clothes, healthy food, comfortable quarters to the poor? The majority of the English, having all these things, regard their absence as a frightful misfortune; society believes itself bound to come to the aid of those who lack

them. . . . In England, the average standard of living a man can hope for in the course of his life is higher than in any other country of the world. This greatly facilitates the extension of pauperism in that kingdom."¹

But Tocqueville did not stop with this explanation—a persuasive and not particularly controversial explanation—of why wealthy nations have so many "paupers." He went on to assert that public assistance and "pauperdom" existed in a symbiotic relationship, and he predicted that each would nourish the other, that both would inexorably grow. Behind this remarkable prediction was a view of human nature. "There are," he wrote, "two incentives to work: the need to live and the desire to improve the conditions of life. Experience has proven that the majority of men can be sufficiently motivated to work only by the first of these incentives. The second is only effective with a small minority. . . . A law which gives all

¹ *Tocqueville and Beaumont on Social Reform*, edited by Seymour Drescher. Harper Torchbooks.

the poor a right to public aid, whatever the origin of their poverty, weakens or destroys the first stimulant and leaves only the second intact."

At this point, we are bound to draw up short and take our leave of Tocqueville. Such gloomy conclusions, derived from a less than benign view of human nature, do not recommend themselves either to the twentieth-century political imagination or to the American political temperament. We do not like to think that our instincts of social compassion might have dismal consequences—not accidentally but inexorably. We simply cannot believe that the universe is so constituted. We much prefer, if a choice has to be made, to have a good opinion of mankind and a poor opinion of our socioeconomic system. We shall, for instance, be more sympathetic, if not to the specific argument, then at least to the general approach of *Regulating the Poor: The Function of Public Welfare* by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward recently published by Pantheon.

Mystery

Professors Piven and Cloward, both leading "activists" in the Welfare Rights Movement, have written a valuable book—but, alas, a confusing one. The confusion results from the two purposes they have in mind.

The first purpose, which they achieve in an excellent and even masterly way, is to answer the same question that perplexed Tocqueville: why has there been such a fantastic "welfare explosion" in the United States? Specifically, why has there been such an extraordinary growth in our welfare population *after* 1964—after, that is, unemployment began to move down toward the unprecedented (in peacetime, anyway) low level of 3.5 percent? Between 1964 and 1968, we had general prosperity of a kind not known since World War II.

This prosperity was not, of course, shared equally by rich and poor, white and black; but all did demonstrably and substantially share in it. Nevertheless, it was precisely during

those years that the "welfare explosion" took place.

I do not think it is sufficiently appreciated by the public at large just how baffling this event was to our scholars and our policy-makers in Washington. For half a decade, our best minds puzzled over the statistics, held innumerable conferences to discuss them, and got nowhere. The only serious effort at explanation was made by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in his famous and brilliant memorandum on the Negro family, in 1965. He called attention to the fact that most of the new welfare recipients were in the Aid to Dependent Children category, that a growing proportion of families in this category were black and fatherless, and that the disorganization of the Negro family seemed to have gathered a sociological momentum of its own—a momentum impervious to the effects of improving economic circumstances. Why this was happening to the Negro family, however, Mr. Moynihan could not convincingly explain. This permitted a great many liberal-minded scholars to spend all of their energies attacking him rather than the problem.

But, eventually, any social phenomenon yields up its mystery. Or, to put it another way: eventually, all social observers, no matter how blurred their vision may be by tacit ideological presuppositions, come to see the obvious. We now know what caused the "welfare explosion." I would also say—though this topic is still exceedingly controversial—that we are coming to realize what has been causing the disorganization of the Negro family.

All the facts are lucidly and authoritatively presented by Professors Piven and Cloward. Unfortunately, they have felt compelled to wrap their findings in a thin, transparently false general theory of welfare in a capitalist society.

This general theory is so simpleminded, so crude in a quasi-Marxist way, that one is embarrassed to summarize it. I will therefore let the authors state it for themselves:

"... Relief arrangements [under capitalism] are not shaped by the im-

pulse to charity . . . [they are] created and sustained to help deal with the malfunctions inherent in market economies.

"Relief arrangements are usually initiated or expanded in response to the political disorders that sometimes follow from the sharp economic downturns or dislocations that periodically beset market systems. The purpose of relief-giving at such times is not to ease hunger and want but to deal with civil disorder among the unemployed. Once stability is restored, however, the relief system is not ordinarily eliminated. Instead, it is reorganized to buttress the normal incentives of the labor market. This is done in two ways. The main way is by cutting the 'able-bodied' off the rolls, whether or not there are jobs, and whether or not the wages offered are sufficient for survival. Second, some of those who cannot work or who are not needed in the labor market are allowed to continue on the relief rolls, but they are treated so barbarously as to make of them a class of pariahs whose degradation breeds a fear and loathing of pauperism among the laboring classes."

Now, the objections to this theory—on historical, sociological, and economic grounds—are too numerous to mention. But one objection ought to be definitive: it does not explain what Piven-Cloward elsewhere in the book explain so well—that is, the "welfare explosion" of the 1960s. True, this "welfare explosion" coincided with rioting in the black slums. But according to the general theory, the poor in the black slums should not have been rioting at all, since the economy was booming and black unemployment was at an all-time low; and if they did riot, it should have been because they were being pushed off welfare into low-paying jobs. In fact, they were rioting while they were going *on* welfare in ever increasing numbers—and while welfare payments were being increased, not while they were being cut back.

The true explanation of the "welfare explosion" is available to any reader of *Regulating the Poor* who will ignore the authors' general theory. (This is easily done: once they

have stated the theory, they happily forget all about it when discussing the 1960s.) This "explosion" was created—in part intentionally, in larger part unwittingly—by public officials and public employees who were executing public policies as part of a "War on Poverty." And these policies had been advocated and enacted by many of the same people who were subsequently so bewildered by the "welfare explosion." Not surprisingly it took them a while to realize that the problem they were trying to solve was the problem they were creating.

Here, as related in Piven-Cloward's book, are the reasons behind the "welfare explosion" of the 1960s:

1. The number of poor people who are eligible for welfare will increase as one elevates the official definitions of "poverty" and "need." The War on Poverty elevated these official definitions; therefore, an increase in the number of "eligibles" automatically followed.

2. The number of eligible poor who actually apply for welfare will increase as welfare benefits go up—as they did throughout the 1960s. When welfare payments (and associated benefits, such as Medicaid and food stamps) compete with low wages, many poor people will rationally prefer welfare. In New York City today, as in many other large cities, welfare benefits not only compete with low wages; they outstrip them.

3. The reluctance of people actually eligible for welfare to apply for it—a reluctance based on pride or ignorance or fear—will diminish if an organized campaign is instituted to "sign them up." Such a campaign was successfully launched in the 1960s by (a) various community organizations sponsored and financed by the Office of Economic Opportunity, (b) the Welfare Rights Movement, and (c) the social work profession, which was now populated by college graduates who thought it their moral duty to help people get on welfare—instead of, as used to be the case, helping them get off welfare. In addition, the courts cooperated by striking down various legal obstacles (for example, residence requirements).

In summary, one can say that the

"welfare explosion" was the work, not of "capitalism" or of any other "ism," but of men and women like Miss Piven and Mr. Cloward—in the Welfare Rights Movement, the social work profession, the office of Economic Opportunity, and so on. It would be nice to think that the "general theory" in *Regulating the Poor* was devised mainly out of an excess of modesty.

Connection

It should be emphasized that Piven-Cloward think the "welfare explosion" is a good thing. They believe more people should be on welfare and that these people should get far more generous benefits than now prevail. One would expect, therefore, that this book would have a triumphant tone to it. Yet it does not. Indeed, it ends rather abruptly, in a minor key.

The reason, one suspects, is that even Piven-Cloward must be less than certain about what they have accomplished. Somehow, the fact that more poor people are on welfare, receiving more generous payments, does not seem to have made this country a nicer place to live—not even for the poor on welfare, whose condition seems not noticeably better than when they were poor and off welfare. Something appears to have gone wrong: a liberal and compassionate social policy has bred all sorts of unanticipated and perverse consequences.

One such perverse consequence, and surely the most important, is the disorganization and demoralization of the Negro family. It used to be thought that a generous welfare program, liberally administered, would help poor families stick together. We now find that as many poor black families are breaking up *after* they get on welfare as before they got on; and that, in general, the prospect of welfare does nothing to hold a poor family together. Mr. Moynihan was perceptive in emphasizing, back in 1965, that there was a connection between family disorganization and the influx of poor black female-headed families to welfare. What we can now see is that the existence of a liberal

welfare program might itself have been responsible, to a significant extent, for this family disorganization.

Unmanned

One must emphasize here that the question of race or ethnicity is of secondary importance. It is true that the Negro family has experienced historical vicissitudes that make it a relatively vulnerable institution. But it is also probable—I would go so far as to say certain—that if the Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century America had had something comparable to our present welfare system, there would have been a "welfare explosion" then, and a sharp increase in Irish family disorganization, too. The family is, in our society, a vital economic institution. Welfare robs it of its economic function. Above all, welfare robs the head of the household of *his* economic function, and tends to make of him a "superfluous man." Welfare, it must be remembered, *competes* with his (usually low) earning ability; and the more generous the welfare program, the worse he makes out in this competition.

Is it surprising, then, that—unmanned and demoralized—he removes himself from family responsibilities that no longer rest on his shoulders? That he drifts out of his home—or is even pushed out of his home—into the male street-corner society of the slum? One wonders how many white middle-class families would survive if mother and children were guaranteed the father's income (or more) without the father's presence? And how many white middle-class fathers would, under these circumstances, persist at their not-always-interesting jobs?

To raise such questions is to point to the fundamental problems of our welfare system, a vicious circle in which the best of intentions merge into the worst of results. It is not easy to imagine just how we might break out of this vicious circle. One might suggest, however, that we begin by going back and reading Tocqueville more respectfully. We may not find the truth in him; but the exercise may help liberate us from our own twentieth-century illusions. □

POP MOM MOON

by John Updike

Rabbit Angstrom, the faded basketball hero of *Rabbit, Run*, is ten years older, and perchance wiser. These scenes from his life are drawn from *Rabbit Redux*, Mr. Updike's forthcoming novel.

Men emerge pale from the little printing plant at four sharp, ghosts for an instant, blinking, until the outdoor light overcomes the air of constant indoor light clinging to them. In winter, Pine Street at this hour is dark; darkness presses down early from the mountain that hangs above this stagnant city of Brewer; but now in summer the granite curbs starred with mica and the row houses differentiated by speckled bastard sidings and the hopeful small porches with their jigsaw brackets and gray milk-bottle boxes and the sooty ginkgo trees and the baking curbside cars wince beneath a brilliance like a frozen explosion. The city, attempting to revive its dying downtown, has torn away blocks of buildings to create parking lots, so that a desolate openness, weedy and rubbled, spills through the once-packed streets, exposing church facades never seen from a distance and generating new perspectives of rear entryways and half-alleys and intensifying the cruel breadth of the light. The sky is cloudless yet colorless, hovering blanched humidity, in the way of these Pennsylvania summers, good for nothing but to make green things grow. Men don't even tan; filmed by sweat, they turn yellow.

A man and his son, Earl Angstrom and Harry, are among the printers released from work. The father is near retirement, a thin man with no excess left to him, his face washed empty by grievances and caved in above the protruding slippage of bad false teeth. The son is five inches taller and fatter; his prime is soft, somehow pale and sour. The small nose and

slightly lifted upper lip that once made the nickname Rabbit fit now seem, along with the thick waist and cautious stoop bred into him by a decade of the linotyper's trade, clues to weakness, a weakness verging on anonymity. Though his height, his bulk, and a remnant alertness in the way he moves his head continue to distinguish him on the street, years have passed since anyone has called him Rabbit.

"Harry, how about a quick one?" his father asks. At the corner where their side street meets Weiser there is a bus stop and a bar, the Phoenix, with a girl nude but for cowboy boots in neon outside and cactuses painted on the dim walls inside. Their buses, when they take them, go in opposite directions: the old man takes number 16A around the mountain to the town of Mount Judge, where he has lived his life, and Harry takes number 12 in the opposite direction to Penn Villas, a new development south of the city, ranch houses and quarter-acre lawns contoured as the bulldozer left them and maple saplings tethered to the earth as if otherwise they might fly away. He moved there with Janice and Nelson three years ago. His father still feels the move out of Mount Judge as a rejection, and so most afternoons they have a drink together to soften the day's parting. Working together ten years, they have grown into the love they would have had in Harry's childhood, had not his mother loomed so large between them.

"Make it a Schlitz," Earl tells the bartender.

"Daiquiri," Harry says. The air conditioning is turned so far up he unrolls his shirt cuffs and buttons them for warmth. He always wears a white shirt to work and after, as a way of canceling the ink. Ritually, he asks his father how his mother is.

But his father declines to make a ritual answer. Usually he says, "As good as can be hoped." Today he sidles a conspiratorial inch closer at the bar and says, "Not as good as could be hoped, Harry."

She has had Parkinson's disease for years now. Harry's mind slides away from picturing her the way she has become, the loosely fluttering knobbed hands, the shuffling, sheepish walk, the eyes that study him with vacant amazement though the doctor says her mind is as good as ever in there, and the mouth that wanders open and forgets to close until saliva reminds it. "At nights, you mean?" The very question offers to hide her in darkness.

Again the old man blocks Rabbit's desire to slide by. "No, the nights are better now. They have her on a new pill, and she says she sleeps better now. It's in her mind, more."

"What is, Pop?"

"We don't talk about it, Harry, it isn't in her nature; it isn't the type of thing she and I have ever talked about. Your mother and I have just let a certain type of thing go unsaid, it was the way we were brought up; maybe it would have been better if we hadn't, I don't know. I mean things now they've put into her mind."

"Who's this they?" Harry sighs into the daiquiri foam and thinks, He's going too; they're both going. Neither makes enough sense. As his father pushes closer against him to explain, he seems one of the hundreds of skinny, whining codgers in and around this city, men who have sucked this same brick tit for sixty years and have dried up with it.

"Why, the ones who come to visit her now she spends half the day in bed. Mamie Kellog, for one. Julia Arndt's another. I hate like the Jesus to bother you with it, Harry, but her talk is getting wild, and with Mim on the West Coast you're the only one to help me straighten out my own mind. I hate to bother you, but her talk is getting so wild that she even talks of telephoning Janice."

"Janice! Why would she call Janice?"

"Well." A pull on the Schlitz. A wiping of the wet upper lip with the bony back of the hand, fingers half-clenched in an old man's clutching way. A loose-toothed grimacing getting set to dive in. "Well, the talk is *about* Janice."

"My Janice?"

"Now, Harry, don't blow your lid. Don't blame the bearer of bad tidings. I'm trying to tell you what they say, not what I believe."

"I'm just surprised there's anything to say. I hardly see her anymore, now that she's over at Springer's lot all the time."

"Well, that's it. That may be your mistake, Harry. You've taken Janice for granted ever since—the time." The time he left her. The time the baby died. The time she took him back. "Ten years ago," his father needlessly adds. Harry is beginning, here in this

cold bar with cactuses in plastic pots on the shelves beneath the mirrors and the little Schlitz spinner doing its polychrome parabola over and over, to feel the world turn. A hopeful coldness inside him grows, grips his wrists inside his cuffs. The news isn't all in, a new combination might break it open, this stale peace.

"Harry, the malice of people surpasses human understanding in my book, and the poor soul has no defenses against it—there she lies and has to listen. Ten years ago, wouldn't she have laid them out? Wouldn't her tongue have cut them down? They've told her that Janice is running around. With one certain man, Harry. Nobody claims she's playing the field."

The coldness spreads up Rabbit's arms to his shoulders, and down the tree of veins toward his stomach. "Do they name the man?"

"Not to my knowledge, Harry. How could they now, when in all likelihood, there is no man?"

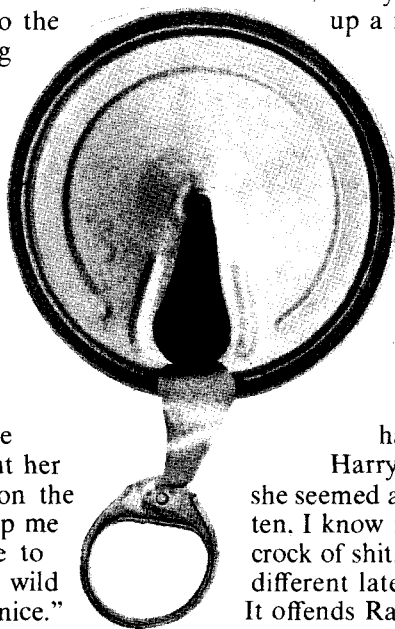
"Well, if they can make up the idea, they can make up a name."

The bar television is running, with the sound turned off. For the twentieth time that day the rocket blasts off, the numbers pouring backwards in tenths of seconds faster than the eye until zero is reached; then the white boiling beneath the tall kettle, the lifting so slow it seems certain to tip, the swift diminishment into a retreating speck, a jiggling star. The men dark along the bar murmur among themselves. They have not been lifted, they are left here.

Harry's father mutters at him, prying. "Has she seemed any different to you lately, Harry? Listen. I know in all probability it's what they call a crock of shit, but—has she seemed any, you know, different lately?"

It offends Rabbit to hear his father swear; he lifts his head fastidiously, as if to watch the television, which has returned to a program where people are trying to guess what sort of prize is hidden behind a curtain, and jump and squeal and kiss each other when it turns out to be an eight-foot frozen-food locker. He might be wrong but for a second he could swear this young housewife opens her mouth in mid-kiss and gives the m.c. a taste of her tongue. Anyway, she won't stop kissing. The m.c.'s eyes roll out to the camera for mercy, and they cut to a commercial. In silence images of spaghetti and eyeballs rolling rattle past. "I don't know," Rabbit says. "She hits the bottle pretty well sometimes, but then so do I."

"Not you," the old man tells him, "you're no drinker, Harry. I've seen drinkers all my life, somebody like Boonie over in engraving, there's a drinker, killing himself with it, and he knows it, he couldn't stop if they told him he'd die tomorrow. You may



have a whiskey or two in the evening, you're no spring chicken anymore, but you're no drinker." He hides his loose mouth in his beer, and Harry taps the bar for another daiquiri. The old man nuzzles closer. "Now, Harry, forgive me for asking if you don't want to talk about it, but how about in bed? That goes along pretty well, does it?"

"No," he answers slowly, disdainful of this prying. "I wouldn't exactly say well. Tell me about Mom. Has she had any of those breathing fits lately?"

"Not a one that I've been woken up for. She sleeps like a baby with those new green pills. This new medicine is a miracle, I must admit; ten more years the only way to kill us'll be to gas us to death—Hitler had the right idea. Already, you know, there aren't any more crazy people: just give 'em a pill morning and evening and they're sensible as Einstein. You wouldn't exactly say it does . . . go along OK, is that what I understood you said?"

"Well, we've never been that great, Pop, frankly. Does she fall down ever? Mom."

"She may take a tumble or two in the day and not tell me about it. I tell her, I *tell* her, stay in bed and watch the box. She has this theory the longer she can do things the longer she'll stay out of bed for good. I figure she should take care of herself, put herself in deep freeze, and in a year or two in all likelihood they'll develop a pill that'll clear this up simple as a common cold. Already, you know, some of these cortisones; but the doctor tells us they don't know but what the side effects may be worse. You know: the big C. My figuring is, take the chance, they're just about ready to lick cancer anyway, and with these transplants pretty soon they can replace your whole insides." The old man hears himself talking too much and slumps to stare into his empty beer, the suds sliding down, but can't help adding, to give it all point, "It's a terrible thing." And when Harry fails to respond: "God, she hates not being active."

The rum is beginning to work. Rabbit has ceased to feel cold, his heart is beginning to lift off. The air in here seems thinner, his eyes adjusting to the dark. He asks, "How's her mind? You aren't saying they should start giving her crazy pills?"

"In honest truth, I won't lie to you, Harry, it's as clear as a bell, when her tongue can find the words. And as I say, she's gotten hipped lately on this Janice thing. It would help a lot—Jesus I hate to bother you, but it's the truth—it would help a lot if you and Janice could spare the time to come over tonight. Not seeing you too often her imagination's free to take off. Now, I know you've promised Sunday for her birthday, but think of it this way: if you're stuck in bed with nobody but the idiot box and a lot of malicious biddies for company, a week can seem a year. If you could make it up there some evening before the weekend, bring Janice along so Mary could look at her—"

"I'd like to, Pop. You know I would."

"I know, Jesus, I know. I know more than you think. You're at just the age to realize your old man's not the dope you always thought he was."

"The trouble is, Janice works in the lot office until ten, eleven all the time, and I don't like to leave the kid alone in the house. In fact, I better be getting back there now just in case." In case it's burned down. In case a madman has moved in. These things happen all the time in the papers. He can read in his father's face—a fishy pinching in at the corners of the mouth, a tightened veiling of the washed-out eyes—the old man's suspicions confirmed. Rabbit sees red. Meddling old crock. Janice: who'd have that mutt? In love with her father, and there she stuck. Happy as a Girl Scout since she began to fill in at her father's lot, half these summer nights out way past supper, TV dinners, tuck Nelson in alone and wait up for her to breeze in blooming with rosy cheeks like a child fresh from a hike and talkative, he's never known her to be so full of herself, in a way it does his heart good. He resents his father trying to get at him with Janice and hits back with the handiest weapon, Mom. "This doctor you have, does he ever mention a nursing home?"

The old man's mind is slow making the switch back to his own wife. Harry has a thought, a spark like where train wheels run over a track switch. Did Mom ever do it to Pop? Play him false. All this poking around about life in bed hints at some experience. Hard to imagine, not only who with but when; she was always in the house as long as he could remember, nobody ever came to visit but the brush man and the Jehovah's Witness; yet the thought excites him, as Pop's rumor chills him, opens up possibilities. Pop is saying, ". . . at the beginning. We want to hold off at least until she's bedridden. If we reach the point where she can't take care of herself before I'm on retirement and there all day, it's an option we might be forced into. I'd hate to see it, though. Jesus, I'd hate to see it."

"Hey, Pop—?"

"Here's my forty cents. Plus a dime for the tip." The way the old man's hand clings curlingly to the quarters in offering them betrays that they are real silver to him instead of cut-copper-sandwich coins that ring flat on the bar top. Old values. The Depression when money was money. Never be sacred again; not even dimes are silver now. Kennedy's face killed half dollars; took them out of circulation, and they've never come back. Put the metal on the moon. The niggling business of settling their bill delays his question about Mom until they are outdoors, and then he sees he can't ask it, he doesn't know his father that well. Out here in the hot light his father has lost all sidling intimacy and looks merely old—liverish scoops below his eyes, broken veins along the sides of his nose, his hair the no-color of cardboard. "What'd you want to ask me?"

"I forget." Harry says, and sneezes. Coming into

this heat from that air conditioning sets off an explosion between his eyes that turns heads around halfway down the block and leaves his nostrils weeping. "No, I remember. The nursing home. How can we afford it? Fifty bucks a day or whatever. It'll suck us right down the drain."

His father laughs, with a sudden snap to retrieve his slipping teeth, and does a little shuffling dance step, right here on the baking sidewalk, beneath the white-on-red BUS STOP sign that people have scratched and lipsticked to read PUS DROP. "Harry, God in His way hasn't been all bad to your mother and me. Believe it or not, there's some advantages to living so long in this day and age. This Sunday she's going to be sixty-five and come under Medicare. I've been paying in since '66; it's like a great weight rolled off my chest. There's no medical expense can break us now. They called LBJ every name in the book, but believe me, he did a lot of good for the little man. Wherever he went wrong, it was his big heart betrayed him. These pretty boys in the sky right now, Nixon'll hog the credit, but it was the Democrats put 'em there; it's been the same story ever since I can remember, ever since Wilson—the Republicans don't do a thing for the little man."

"Right," Harry says blankly. His bus is coming. "Tell her we'll be over Sunday." He pushes to a clear space at the back where, looking out while hanging to the bar, he sees his father as one of the "little men." Pop stands whittled by the great American glare, squinting in the manna of blessings that come down from the government, shuffling from side to side in nervous happiness that his day's work is done, that a beer is inside him, that Armstrong is above him, that the U.S. is the crown and stupefaction of human history. Like a piece of grit in the launching pad, he has done his part. Still, he has been the one to keep his health; who would have thought Mom would fail first? Rabbit's mind, as the bus dips into its bag of gears and surges and shudders, noses closer into the image of her he keeps like a dreaded relic: the black hair gone gray, the mannish mouth too clever for her life, the lozenge-shaped nostrils that to him as a child suggested a kind of soreness within, the eyes whose color he had never dared learn closed, bulge-lidded in her failing, the whole long face, slightly shining as if with sweat, lying numbed on the pillow. He can't bear to see her like this is the secret of his seldom visiting, not Janice. The source of his life staring wasted there while she gropes for the words to greet him. And that gentle tawny smell of sickness that doesn't even stay in her room but comes downstairs to meet them in the front hall among the umbrellas and follows them into the kitchen, where poor Pop warms their meals. A smell like gas escaping, that used to worry her so when he and Mim were little.

He bows his head and curtly prays. *Forgive me, forgive us, make it easy for her. Amen.* He only ever prays on buses. Now this bus has that smell.

The bus has too many Negroes. Rabbit notices them more and more. They've been here all along; as a tiny kid he remembers streets in Brewer you held your breath walking through, though they never hurt you, just looked; but now they're noisier. Instead of bald-looking heads, they're bushy. That's OK, it's more Nature, Nature is what we're running out of. Two of the men in the shop are Negroes, and after a while you didn't even notice; at least they remember how to laugh. Sad business, being a Negro man, always underpaid, their eyes don't look like our eyes, blood-shot, brown, liquid in them about to quiver out. Read somewhere some anthropologist thinks Negroes instead of being more primitive are the latest thing to evolve, the newest men. In some ways tougher, in some ways more delicate. Certainly dumber, but then, being smart hasn't amounted to so much, the atom bomb and the one-piece aluminum beer can. And you can't say Bill Cosby's stupid.

But against these educated, tolerant thoughts rests a certain fear; he doesn't see why they have to be so noisy. The four seated right under him, jabbing and letting their noise come out in big silvery hoops; they know damn well they're bugging the fat white wives pulling their shopping bags home. Well, that's kids of any color: but strange. They are a strange race. Not only their skins but the way they're put together, loose-jointed like lions, strange about the head, as if their thoughts were a different shape and came out twisted even when they meant no menace. It's as if all these Afro hair bushes and gold earrings and hoopy noise on buses, seeds of some tropical plant sneaked in by the birds, were taking over the garden. His garden. Rabbit knows it's his garden and that's why he's put a flag decal on the back window of the Falcon even though Janice says it's corny and fascist. In the papers you read about these houses in Connecticut where the parents are away in the Bahamas and the kids come in and smash it up for a party. More and more this country is getting like that. As if it just grew here instead of people laying down their lives to build it.

The bus works its way down Weiser and crosses the Running Horse River and begins to drop people instead of taking them on. The city with its tired five-and-dimes (that used to be a wonderland: the counters as high as his nose and the Big Little Books smelling like Christmas) and its Kroll's Department Store (where he once worked knocking apart crates behind the furniture department) and its flowerpotted traffic circle where the trolley tracks used to make a clanging star of intersection and then the empty dusty windows where stores have been starved by the suburban shopping malls and the sad narrow places that come and go called Go-Go or Boutique and the funeral parlors with imitation granite faces and the surplus outlets and a shoe parlor that sells hot roasted peanuts and Afro newspapers printed in Philly—MBOYA MARTYRED—and a flower shop where they sell num-

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bers and have punchboards and a variety store next to a pipe-rack clothing retailer—next to a corner dive called JIMBO'S *Friendly LOUNGE*, cigarette ends of the city snuffed by the bridge; the city gives way, after the flash of open water that in his youth was choked with coal silt (a man once tried to commit suicide from this bridge but stuck there up to his hips until the police pulled him out) but that now has been dredged and supports a flecking of moored pleasure boats, to West Brewer, a gappy imitation of the city, the same squeezed houses of brick painted red, but broken here and there by the twirlers of a car lot, the pumps and blazoned overhang of a gas station, the lakelike depth of a supermarket parking lot crowded with shimmering fins. Surging and spitting, the bus, growing lighter, the Negroes vanishing, moves toward a hope of spaciousness, past residential fortresses with sprinkled lawn around all four sides and clipped hydrangeas above newly pointed retaining walls, past a glimpse of the museum whose gardens were always in blossom and where the swans ate the breadcrusts schoolchildren threw them, then a glimpse of the sunstruck windows, orange facing the sinking sun, of the tall new wing of the County Hospital for the Insane. Closer at hand, the West Brewer Dry Cleaners, a toy store calling itself Hobby Heaven, a Rialto movie house with a stubby marquee: 2001: SPACE OD'SEY. The street curves, becomes a highway, dips into green suburbs where in the twenties little knights of industry built half-timbered dream houses, pebbled mortar and clinker brick, stucco flaky as piecrust, witches' houses of candy and hardened cookie dough, with two-car garages and curved driveways. In Brewer County, but for a few baronial estates ringed by iron fences and moated by miles of lawn, there is nowhere higher to go than these houses; the most successful dentists may get to buy one, the pushiest insurance salesmen, the suavest ophthalmologists. This section even has another name, distinguishing itself from West Brewer: Penn Park. Penn Villas echoes the name hopefully, though it is not incorporated into this borough but sits on the border of Furnace Township, looking in. The township, where once charcoal-fed furnaces had smelted the iron for revolutionary muskets, is now still mostly farmland, and its few snowplows and single sheriff can hardly cope with this ranch-house village of muddy lawns and potholed macadam and sub-code sewers the developers suddenly left in its care.

Rabbit gets off at a stop in Penn Park and walks down a street of mock Tudor, Emberly Avenue, to where the road surface changes at the township line and becomes Emberly Drive in Penn Villas. He lives on Vista Crescent, third house from the end. Once there may have been here a vista, a softly sloped valley of red barns and fieldstone farmhouses, but more Penn Villas had been added and now the view from any window is as if into a fragmented mirror, of houses like this, telephone wires and television aerials showing where the glass cracked. His house is

faced with apple-green aluminum clapboards and is numbered 26. Rabbit steps onto his flagstone porchlet and opens his door with its three baby windows arranged like three steps, echoing the door chime of three stepped tones.

Hey, Dad," his son calls from the living room, a room on his right the size of what used to be called a parlor, with a fireplace they never use. "They've left earth's orbit! They're forty-three thousand miles away."

"Good for them," he says. "Your mother here?"

"No. At school they let us all into assembly to see the launch."

"She call at all?"

"Not since I've been here. I just got in a while ago." Nelson, at thirteen, is under average height, with his mother's dark complexion, and something finely cut and wary about his face that may come from the Angstroms. His long eyelashes come from nowhere, and his shoulder-length hair is his own idea. Somehow, Rabbit feels, if he were taller it would be all right, to have hair so long. As is, the resemblance to a girl is frighteningly strong.

"Whadja do all day?"

The same television program, of people guessing and getting and squealing and kissing the m.c., is still going on.

"Nothing much."

"Go to the playground?"

"For a while."

"Then where?"

"Oh, over to West Brewer, just to hang around Billy's apartment. Hey?"

"Yeah?"

"His father got him a mini-bike for his birthday. It's real cool. With that real long front part so you have to reach up for the handles."

"You rode it?"

"He only let me once. It's all shiny, there isn't a speck of paint on it; it's just metal, with a white banana seat."

"He's older than you, isn't he?"

"By two months. That's all. Just two months, Dad."

"Where does he ride it? It's not legal on the street, is it?"

"Their building has a big parking lot he rides it all around. Nobody says anything. It only cost a hundred-eighty dollars, Dad."

"Keep talking; I'm getting a beer."

The house is small enough so that the boy can be heard by his father in the kitchen, his voice mixed with gleeful greedy spurts from the television and the chunky suck of the refrigerator door opening and shutting. "Hey, Dad, something I don't understand."

"Shoot."

"I thought the Fasnachts were divorced."

"Separated."

"Then how come his father keeps getting him all this neat junk? You ought to see the hi-fi set he has, that's all his, for his room, not even to share. Four speakers, Dad, and earphones. The earphones are fantastic. It's like you're way inside Tiny Tim."

"That's the place to be," Rabbit says, coming into the living room. "Want a sip?"

The boy takes a sip from the can, putting a key-hole width of foam on the fuzz of his upper lip, and makes a bitter face.

Harry explains, "When people get divorced the father doesn't stop liking the kids, he just can't live with them anymore. The reason Fosnacht keeps getting Billy all this expensive stuff is probably he feels guilty for leaving him."

"Why did they get separated, Dad, do you know?"

"Beats me. The bigger riddle is, why did they ever get married?" Rabbit knew Peggy Fosnacht when she was Peggy Gring, a big-assed wall-eyed girl in the middle row always waving her hand in the air because she thought she had the answer. Fosnacht he knew less well: a weedy little guy always shrugging his shoulders; used to play the saxophone in prom bands, now a partner in a music store on the upper end of Weiser Street, used to be called Chords 'n' Records, now Fidelity Audio. At the discount Fosnacht got, Billy's hi-fi set must have cost next to nothing. Like these prizes they keep socking into these young shriekers. The one that french-kissed the m.c. is off now, and a colored couple is guessing. Pale, but definitely colored. That's OK; let 'em guess, win, and shriek with the rest of us.

Better than sniping from rooftops. Still, he wonders how that black bride would be. Big lips, suck you right off, the men are slow as Jesus, long as whips, takes everything to get them up, in there forever, that's why white women need them, white men too quick about it, have to get on with the job, making America great. Rabbit loves, on *Laugh-In*, when Teresa does the go-go bit, the way they paint the words in white on her skin. When they watch as a family Janice and Nelson are always asking him what the words are; since he took up the printer's trade he can read like a flash, upside down, mirror-wise too: he always had good quick eyes. He asks Nelson. "Why don't you stay at the playground anymore? When I was your age I'd be playing Horse and Twenty-One all day long."

"Yeah, but you were good. You were tall." Nelson used to be crazy for sports, Little League, intramural, but lately he isn't. Rabbit blames it on a scrapbook his own mother kept, of his basketball days in the late forties, when he set some county records: last winter every time they would go visit Mt. Judge Nelson would ask to get it out, and lie on the floor with

it, those old dry-yellow games, the glue dried to dust, MT. JUDGE TOPPLES ORIOLE, ANGSTROM HITS FOR 37, just happening for the kid, that happened twenty years ago, light from a star.

"I got tall," Rabbit tells him. "At your age I wasn't much taller than you are." A lie, but not really. A few inches. In a world where inches matter. Putts. Orbits. Squaring up a form. He feels bad about Nelson's height. His own never did him much good; if he could take five inches off himself and give them to Nelson he might. If it didn't hurt.

"Anyway, Dad, sports are square now. Nobody does it."

"Well, what isn't square now? Besides pill-popping and draft-dodging. And letting your hair grow down into your eyes. Where the hell is your mother? I'm going to call her. Turn the frigging TV down for once in your life."

David Frost has replaced *The Match Game*, so Nelson turns it off entirely. Harry regrets the scared look that glimmered across the kid's face: like the look on his father's face when he sneezed on the street. Christ, they're even scared to let him sneeze. His son and father seem alike fragile and sad to him. That's the trouble with caring about anybody: you begin to feel bad about them; you want to put them on a shelf.

The telephone is on the lower of a set of see-through shelves that in theory divides the living room from a kind of alcove they call a breakfast nook. A few cookbooks sit on them, but Janice has never to his knowledge looked into them, just dishes up the same fried chicken and tasteless steak and peas and french fries she's always dished up. Harry dials the familiar number and a familiar voice answers. "Springer Motors. Mr. Stavros speaking."

"Charlie, hi. Hey, is Janice around?"

"Sure is, Harry. How's tricks?" Stavros is a salesman and always has to say something.

"Tricky," he answers.

"Hold on, friend. The good woman's right here." Off-phone, his voice calls, "Pick it up. It's your old man."

Another receiver is lifted. Through the knothole of momentary silence Rabbit sees the office: the gleaming display cars on the showroom floor, old man Springer's frosted-glass door shut, the green-topped counter with the three steel desks behind: Stavros at one, Janice at another, and Mildred Kroust the bookkeeper Springer has had for thirty years at the one in between, except she's usually out sick with some sort of female problem she's developed late in life so her desk top is empty and bare but for wire baskets and a spindle and a blotter. Rabbit can also see last year's puppy-dog calendar on the wall and the cardboard



cutout of the Toyota station wagon on the old coffee-colored safe, behind the Christmas tree. The last time he was at Springer's lot was for their Christmas party. "Harry, sweet," Janice says, and now that he has been made suspicious he does hear something new in her voice, a breathy lilt of faint hurry, of a song he has interrupted her singing. "You're going to scold me, aren't you?"

"No. the kid and I were just wondering if—and if so when the hell—we're going to get a home-cooked meal around here."

"Oh, I know," she sings, "I hate it too; it's just that with Mildred out so much we've had to go into her books, and her system is really zilch." Zilch: he hears another voice in hers. "Honestly," she sings on, "if it turns out she's been swindling Daddy of millions, none of us will be surprised."

"Yeah. Look, Janice. It sounds like you're having a lot of fun over there—"

"Fun? I'm *working*, sweetie."

"Sure. Now what the hell is really going on?"

"What do you mean, *going on*? Nothing is going on except your wife is trying to bring home a little extra bread." Bread? "Going on"—really. You may think your seven or whatever dollars an hour you get for sitting in the dark diddling that machine is wonderful money, Harry, but the fact is a hundred dollars doesn't buy anything anymore, it just *goes*."

"Jesus, why am I getting this lecture on inflation? All I want to know is why my wife is never home to cook the goddamn supper for me and the kid."

"Harry, has somebody been bugging you about me?"

"Bugging? How would they do that? Janice. Just tell me, shall I put two TV dinners in the oven or what?"

A pause, during which he has a vision: sees her wings hover, her song suspended; imagines himself soaring, rootless, free. An old premonition, dim. Janice says, with measured words, so he feels as when a child watching his mother leveling tablespoons of sugar into a bowl of batter, "Could you, sweet? Just for tonight? We're in the middle of a little crisis here, frankly. It's too complicated to explain, but we have to get some figures firm or we can't do the paychecks tomorrow."

"Who's this we? Your father there?"

"Oh, sure."

"Could I talk to him a second?"

"Why? He's out on the lot."

"I want to know if he got those tickets for the Blasts game. The kid's dying to go."

"Well, actually, I don't see him, I guess he's gone home for supper."

"So it's just you and Charlie there."

"Other people are in and out. We're *desperately* trying to untangle this mess Mildred made. This is the last night, Harry, I promise. I'll be home between eight and nine, and then tomorrow night let's all go to a movie together. That space thing is still in West

Brewer, I noticed this morning while driving in."

Rabbit is suddenly tired, of this conversation, of everything. Confusing energy surrounds him. A man's appetites diminish, but the world's never. "OK. Be home when you can. But we got to talk."

"I'd love to talk, Harry." From her tone she assumes "talk" means fuck, when he did mean talk. She hangs up: a satisfied impatient sound.

He opens another beer. The pull-tab breaks, so he has to find the rusty old church key underneath everything in the knife drawer. He heats up two Salisbury steak dinners; while waiting for the oven to preheat to 400 degrees, he reads the ingredients listed on the package: water, beef, peas, dehydrated potato flakes, bread crumbs, mushrooms, flour, butter, margarine, salt, malto-dextrin, tomato paste, cornstarch, Worcestershire sauce, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, monosodium glutamate, nonfat dry milk, dehydrated onions, flavoring, sugar, caramel color, spice, cysteine and thiamine hydrochloride, gum arabic. There is no clue from the picture on the tinfoil where all this stuff fits in. He always thought gum arabic was something you erased with. Thirty-six years old and he knows less than when he started. With the difference that now he knows how little he'll always know. He'll never know how to talk Chinese or how screwing an African princess feels. The six o'clock news is all about space, all about emptiness: some bald man plays with little toys to show the docking and undocking maneuvers, and then a panel talks about the significance of this for the next five hundred years. They keep mentioning Columbus, but as far as Rabbit can see it's the exact opposite: Columbus flew blind and hit something, these guys see exactly where they're aiming and it's a big round nothing. The Salisbury steak tastes of preservative, and Nelson eats only a few bites. Rabbit tries to joke him into it: "Can't eat a TV dinner without TV." They channel-hop, trying to find something to hold them, but there is nothing; it all slides past until, after nine, on *Carol Burnett*, she and Gomer Pyle do an actually pretty funny skit about the Lone Ranger. It takes Rabbit back to when he used to sit in the radio-listening armchair back on Jackson Road, its arms darkened with grease spots from the peanut butter cracker-sandwiches he used to stack there to listen with. Mom used to have a fit. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night it came on at seven thirty, and if it was summer you'd come in from kick-the-can or three-stops-or-a-catch and the neighborhood would grow quiet all across the backyards and then at eight the doors would slam and the games begin again, those generous summer days, just enough dark to fit sleep into, a war being fought across oceans just so he could spin out his days in such happiness, in such quiet growing. Eating Wheaties.

In this skit the Lone Ranger has a wife. She stamps

around a cabin saying how she hates housework, hates her lonely life. "You're never home," she says, "you keep disappearing in a cloud of dust and a hearty 'Heigh-ho, Silver.'" The unseen audience laughs, Rabbit laughs. Nelson doesn't see what's so funny. Rabbit tells him, "That's how they always used to introduce the program."

The kid says crossly, "I know, Dad," and Rabbit loses the thread of the skit a little; there has been a joke he didn't hear whose laughter is dying.

Now the Lone Ranger's wife is complaining that Daniel Boone brings his wife beautiful furs, but "What do I ever get from you? A silver bullet." She opens a door and a bushel of silver bullets comes crashing out and floods the floor. For the rest of the skit Carol Burnett and Gomer Pyle and the man who plays Tonto (not Sammy Davis, Jr., but another TV Negro) keep slipping and crunching on these bullets, by accident. Rabbit thinks of the millions who are watching, the millions the sponsors are paying, and still nobody took time to realize that this would happen, a mess of silver bullets on the floor. Tonto tells the Lone Ranger, "Better next time, put-um bullet in gun first."

The wife turns to complaining about Tonto. "*Him*. Why must we always keep having him to dinner? He never has us back."

Tonto tells her that if she comes to his tepee, she will be kidnapped by seven or eight braves. Instead of being frightened, she is interested. She rolls those big Burnett eyes and says, "Let's go, *kemo sabe*."

Nelson asks, "Dad, what's *kemo sabe*?"

Rabbit is surprised to have to say, "I don't know. Something like 'good friend' or 'boss,' I suppose." Indeed, come to think of it he understands nothing about Tonto. The Lone Ranger is a white man, so law and order on the range will work to his benefit, but what about Tonto? A Judas to his race, the more disinterested and lonely and heroic figure of virtue. When did he get his payoff? Why was he faithful to the masked stranger? In the boyhood days one never asked. Tonto was simply on "the side of right." It seemed a correct dream then, red and white together, red loving white as naturally as stripes in the flag. Where has "the side of right" gone? He has missed several jokes while trying to answer Nelson. The skit is approaching its climax. The wife is telling the Lone Ranger, "You must choose between him or me." Arms folded, she stands fierce.

The Lone Ranger's pause for decision is not long. "Saddle up, Tonto," he says. He puts on the phonograph a record of the *William Tell* Overture, and both men leave. The wife tiptoes over, a bullet crunching underfoot, and changes the record to "Indian Love Call." Tonto enters from the other side of the screen. He and she kiss and hug. "I've always been interested," Carol Burnett confides out to the audience, her face getting huge, "in Indian affairs."

There is a laugh from the invisible audience, and even Rabbit sitting there in his easy chair laughs, but

underneath the laugh this final gag falls flat, maybe because everybody still thinks of Tonto as incorruptible, as above it all, like Jesus and Armstrong. "Bedtime, huh?" Rabbit says. He turns off the show as it unravels into a string of credits. The sudden little star flares, then fades.

Nelson says, "The kids at school say Mr. Fosnacht was having an affair, that's why they got divorced."

"Or maybe he just got tired of not knowing which of his wife's eyes was looking at him."

"Dad, what is an affair exactly?"

"Oh, it's two people seeing each other when they're married to somebody else."

"Did that ever happen to you and Mom?"

"I wouldn't say so. I took a vacation once, that didn't last very long. When you were about three. You wouldn't remember."

"I do, though. I remember Mom crying a lot, and everybody chasing you at the baby's funeral, and I remember standing in the place on Wilbur Street, with just you in the room beside me, and looking down at the town through the window screen, and knowing Mom was in the hospital."

"Yeah. Those were poor days. This Saturday, if Grandpa Springer has got the tickets he said he would, we'll go to the Blasts game."

"I know," the boy says, unenthusiastic, and drifts toward the stairs. It unsettles Harry, how in the corner of his eye, once or twice a day, he seems to see another woman in the house, a woman who is not Janice; when it is only his long-haired son.

One more beer. He scrapes Nelson's uneaten dinner into the Disposal, which sometimes sweetly stinks because the Penn Villas sewers flow sluggishly, carelessly engineered. He moves through the downstairs collecting glasses for the dishwasher; one of Janice's stunts is to wander around leaving dreggy cups with saucers used as ashtrays and wineglasses coated with vermouth on whatever ledges occur to her—the TV top, a windowsill. How can she be helping untangle Mildred's mess? Maybe out of the house she's a whirlwind of efficiency. And a heigh-ho Silver. Indian affairs. Poor Pop and his rumor. Poor Mom lying there prey to poison tongues and nightmares. The two of them, their minds gone dry as haystacks rats slither through. His mind shies away. He looks out the window and sees in dusk the black lines of a TV aerial, an aluminum clothes tree, a basketball hoop on a far garage. How can he get the kid interested in sports? If he's too short for basketball, then baseball. Anything, just to put something there, some bliss, to live on later for a while. If he goes empty now he won't last at all, because we get emptier. Rabbit turns from the window and everywhere in his own house sees a slippery disposable gloss. It glints back at him from the synthetic fabric of the living-room chairs and sofa, the synthetic artiness of a lamp Janice bought with a piece of driftwood weighted and wired as a base, the unnatural-looking natural wood of the shelves empty but for a few ashtrays

with the sheen of fairgrounds souvenirs; it glints back at him from the steel sink, the kitchen linoleum with its whorls as of madness, oil in water, things don't mix. The window above the sink is black and opaque as the orange that paints the asylum windows. He sees mirrored in it his own wet hands. Underwater. He crumples the aluminum beer can he has absentmindedly drained. Its contents feel metallic inside him; corrosive, fattening. Things don't mix. His inability to fasten on to any thought and make something of it must be fatigue. Rabbit lifts himself up the stairs, pushes himself through the underwater motions of undressing and dental care, sinks into bed without bothering to turn out the lights downstairs and in the bathroom. He hears from a mournful smothered radio noise that Nelson is still awake. He thinks he should get up and say good-night, give the kid a blessing, but a weight crushes him while light persists into his bedroom, along with the boy's soft knocking noises, opening and shutting doors, looking for something to do. Since infancy Rabbit sleeps best when others are up, upright like nails holding down the world, like lampposts, street signs, dandelion stems, cobwebs . . .

Something big slithers into the bed. Janice. The fluorescent dial on the bureau is saying five of eleven, its two hands merged into one finger. She is warm in her nightie. Skin is warmer than cotton. He was dreaming about a parabolic curve, trying to steer on it, though the thing he was trying to steer was fighting him, like a broken sled.

"Get it untangled?" he asks her.

"Just about. I'm so sorry, Harry. Daddy came back and he just wouldn't let us go."

"Catch a nigger by the toe," he mumbles.

"What sort of evening did you and Nelson have?"

"A kind of nothing sort of evening."

"Anybody call?"

"Nobody."

He senses she is, late as it is, alive, jazzed up, and wants to talk, apologetic, wanting to make it up. Her being in the bed changes its quality, from a resisting raft he is seeking to hold to a curving course to a nest, a laden hollow, itself curved. Her hand seeks him out and he brushes her away with an athlete's old instinct to protect that spot. She turns then her back on him. He accepts this rejection. He nestles against her. Her waist where no bones are nips like a bird dipping. He had been afraid marrying her she would get fat like her mother but as she ages more and more her skinny little stringy go-getter of a father comes out in her. His hand leaves the dip to stray around in front to her belly, faintly lovingly loose from having had two babies. Puppy's neck. Should he have let her have another to replace the one that died? Maybe that was the mistake. It had all seemed like a pit to him then, her womb and the grave, sex and death, he had pulled back, refused.

||.

The game drags on, with a tedious flurry of strategy, of pinch hitters and intentional walks, prolonging the end. Hazleton wins, 7-3. Old Man Springer sighs, getting up as if from a nap in an unnatural position. He wipes a fleck of beer from his moustache. "'Fraid our boys didn't come through for you, Nellie," he says.

"That's OK, Grampa. It was neat."

To Harry he says, "That young Trexler is a comer though."

Groggy and cross from two beers in the sun, Rabbit doesn't invite Springer into his house after the ball game, just thanks him a lot for everything. The house is silent, like outer space. On the kitchen table is a sealed envelope, addressed "Harry." The letter inside, in Janice's half-formed hand, with its unsteady slant and miserly cramping, says,

Harry dear—

I must go off a few days to think. Please don't try to find or follow us *please*. It is very important that we all respect each other as people and trust each other now. I was shocked by your idea that I keep a lover since I don't think this would be honest and it made me wonder if I mean anything to you at all. Tell Nelson I've gone to the Poconos with Grandmom. Don't forget to give him lunch money for the playground.

Love,
Jan

"Jan"—her name from the years she used to work at Kroll's selling salted nuts in the smock with *Jan* stitched above the pocket in script. In those days some afternoons they would go to her friend's apartment up on Eighth Street. The horizontal rose rays as the sun set behind the great gray gasholder. The wonder of it as she let him slip off all her clothes. Underwear more substantial then: stocking snaps to undo, the marks of elastic printed on her skin. Jan. That name suspended in her these fifteen years; the notes she left for him around the house were signed "J."

"Where's Mom?" Nelson asks.

"She's gone to the Poconos," Rabbit says, pulling the note back toward his chest, in case the boy tries to read it. "She's gone with Mom-mom, her legs were getting worse in this heat. I know it seems crazy, but that's how things are sometimes. You and I can eat over at Burger Bliss tonight."

The boy's face—freckled, framed by hair that covers his ears, his plump lips buttoned shut and his eyes sunk in fear of making a mistake—goes rapt, seems to listen, as when he was three and flight and death were rustling above him. Perhaps his experience then shapes what he says now. Firmly he tells his father, "She'll be back."

Sunday dawns muggy. The seven o'clock news says there was scattered shooting again last night in York and the western part of the state. Edgartown police chief Dominick J. Arena is expected today formally to charge Senator Kennedy with leaving the scene of

an accident. Apollo Eleven is in lunar orbit and the Eagle is being readied for its historic descent. Rabbit slept badly and turns the box off and walks around the lawn barefoot to shock the headache out of his skull. The houses of Penn Villas are hushed, with the odd Catholic car roaring off to Mass. Nelson comes down around nine, and after making him breakfast, Harry goes back to bed with a cup of coffee and the Sunday Brewer *Triumph*. Snoopy on the front page of the funny papers is lying dreaming on his doghouse, and soon Rabbit falls asleep. The kid looked scared. The boy's face shouts, and a soundless balloon comes out. When he awakes, the electric clock says five of eleven. The second hand sweeps around and around; a wonder the gears don't wear themselves to dust. Rabbit dresses—fresh white shirt out of respect for Sunday—and goes downstairs the second time, his feet still bare, the carpeting fuzzy to his soles, a bachelor feeling. The house feels enormous. all his. He picks up the phone book and looks up STAVROS CHAS 1204 Eisenhower Av. He doesn't dial, merely gazes at the name and the number as if to see his wife, smaller than a pencil dot, crawling between the letters. He dials a number he knows by heart.

His father answers. "Yes?" A wary voice, ready to hang up on a madman or a salesman.

"Pop, hi; hey, I hope you didn't wait up or anything the other night; we weren't able to make it and I couldn't even get to a phone."

A little pause, not much, just enough to let him know they were indeed disappointed. "No, we figured something came up and went to bed about the usual time. Your mother isn't one to complain, as you know."

"Right. Well, look. About today."

His voice goes hoarse to whisper, "Harry, you must come over today. You'll break her heart if you don't."

"I will, I will, but—"

The old man has cupped his mouth against the receiver, urging hoarsely, "This may be her last, you know. Birthday."

"We're coming, Pop. I mean, some of us are. Janice has had to go off."

"Go off how?"

"It's kind of complicated, something about her mother's legs and the Poconos; she decided last night she had to, I don't know. It's nothing to worry about. Everybody's all right, she's just not here. The kid's here though." To illustrate, he calls, "Nelson!"

There is no answer.

"He must be out on his bike, Pop. He's been right around all morning. When would you like us?"

"Whenever it suits you, Harry. Late afternoon or so. Come as early as you can. We're having roast

beef. Your mother wanted to bake a cake but the doctor thought it might be too much for her. I bought a nice one over at the bakery. Butterscotch icing, didn't that used to be your favorite?"

"It's her birthday, not mine. What should I get her for a present?"

"Just your simple presence, Harry, is all the present she desires."

"Yeah, OK. I'll think of something. Explain to her Janice won't be coming."

"As my father, God rest, used to say, It is to be regretted, but it can't be helped."

Once Pop finds that ceremonious vein, he tends to ride it. Rabbit hangs up. The kid's bike—a rusty Schwinn, been meaning to get him a new one, both fenders rub—is not in the garage. Nor is the Falcon. Only the oil cans, the gas can, the lawnmower, the jumbled garden hose (Janice must have used it last), a lawn rake with missing teeth, and the Falcon's snow tires are there. For an hour or so Rabbit swims around the house in a daze, not knowing who to call, not having a car, not wanting to go inside with the television set. He pulls weeds

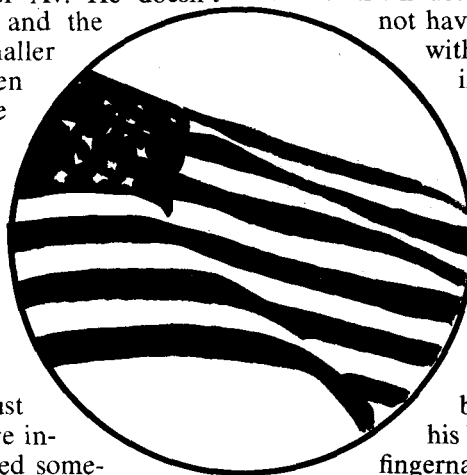
in the border beds where that first excited summer of their own house Janice planted bulbs and set in plants and shrubs. Since then they have done nothing, just watched the azaleas die and accepted the daffodils and iris as they came in and let the phlox fight it out as these subsequent summers wore on, nature lost in nature. He weeds until he begins to see himself as a weed and his hand with its ugly big moons on the

fingernails as God's hand choosing and killing; then he goes inside the house and looks into the refrigerator and eats a carrot raw. He looks into the phone directory and looks up Foszacht; there are a lot of them and it takes him a while to figure out M is the one, M for Margaret and just the initial to put off obscene calls, though if he were on that kick he'd soon figure out that initials were unattached women. "Peggy, hi; this is Harry Angstrom." He says his name with faint proud emphasis; they were in school together, and she remembers him when he was somebody. "I was just wondering, is Nelson over there playing with Billy? He went off on his bike a while ago and I'm wondering where to."

Peggy says, "He's not here, Harry. Sorry." Her voice is frosted with all she knows, Janice burbling into her ear yesterday. Then more warmly she asks, "How's everything going?" He reads the equation—Ollie left me; Janice left you: hello.

He says hastily, "Great. Hey, if Nelson comes by, tell him I want him. We got to go to his grandmother's."

Her voice cools in saying good-bye, joins the vast glaring ice-face of all those who know. Nelson seems



the one person left in the county who doesn't know: this makes him even more precious. Yet, when the boy returns, red-faced and damp-haired from hard pedaling, he tells his father, "I was at the Fosnachts."

Rabbit blinks and says, "OK. After this, let's keep in better touch. I'm your mother and your father for the time being." They eat lunch, Lebanon baloney on stale rye. They walk up Emberly to Weiser and catch a 12 bus east into Brewer. It being Sunday, they have to wait twenty minutes under the cloudless colorless sky. At the hospital stop a crowd of visitors gets on, having done their duty, dazed, carrying away dead flowers and read books. Boats, white arrowheads tipping wrinkled wakes, are buzzing in the black river below the bridge. A colored kid leaves his foot in the aisle when Rabbit tries to get off; he steps over it. "Big feet," the boy remarks to his companion.

"Fat lips," Nelson, following, says to the colored boy.

They try to find a store open. His mother was always difficult to buy presents for. Other children had given their mothers cheerful junk: dime-store jewelry, bottles of toilet water, boxes of candy, scarves. For Mom that had been too much, or not enough. Mom always gave her something she had made: a woven potholder, a hand-illustrated calendar. Rabbit was poor at making things so he gave her himself, his trophies, his headlines. Mom had seemed satisfied: lives and not things concerned her. But now what? What can a dying person want? Grotesque prosthetic devices—arms, legs, battery-operated hearts—run through Rabbit's head as he and Nelson walk the dazzling, Sunday-stilled downtown of Brewer. Up near Ninth and Weiser they find a drug-store open. Thermos bottles, sunglasses, shaving lotion; Kodak film, plastic baby pants: nothing for his mother. He wants something big, something bright, something to get through to her. Realgirl Liquid Make-up, Super Plenamins, Non-Smear polish remover, Nudit for the Legs. A rack of shampoo-in hair color, a different smiling cunt on every envelope: Snow Queen Blond, Danish Wheat, Killarney Russet, Parisian Spice, Spanish Black Wine. Nelson plucks him by the sleeve of his white shirt and leads to where a Sunbeam Clipmaster and a Roto-Shine Magnetic Electric Shoe Polisher nestle side by side, glossily packaged. "She doesn't wear shoes anymore, just slippers," he says, "and she never cut her hair that I can remember. It used to hang down to her waist." But his attention is drawn on to a humidifier for \$12.95. From the picture on the box, it looks like a fat flying saucer. No matter how immobile she got, it would be there. Around Brewer, though, the summers are as humid as they can be anyway, but maybe in the winter, the radiators dry out the house, the wallpaper peels, the skin cracks; it might help. It would be there night and day, when he wasn't. He

moves on to a Kantleek Water Bottle and a two-and-a-half-inch reading glass and dismisses both as morbid. His whole insides are beginning to feel sickly. The pain of the world is a crater all these syrups and pills a thousandfold would fail to fill. He comes to the Quikease Electric Massager with Scalp Comb. It has the silhouettes of naked women on the box, gracefully touching their shoulders, Lesbians, caressing the backs of their necks, where else the box leaves to the imagination, with what looks like a hairbrush on a live wire. \$11.95. Bedsores. It might help. It might make her laugh, tickle, buzz: it is life. Life is a massage. And it costs a dollar less than the humidifier. Time is ticking. Nelson tugs at his sleeve and wants a maple walnut ice cream soda. While the kid is eating it, Rabbit buys a birthday card to go with the massager. It shows a rooster crowing, a crimson sun rising, and green letters shouting on the outside *It's Great to Get Up in the A.M.* . . . and on the inside . . . *to Wish You a Happy Birthday, MA!* Ma. Am. God, what a lot of ingenious crap there is in the world. He buys it anyway, because the rooster is bright orange and jubilant enough to get through to her. Her eyes aren't dim necessarily but he better play it safe.

The world outside is bright and barren. The two of them feel alone on the empty street, Rabbit gripping his bulky package. Where is everybody? Is there life on earth? Three blocks down the deserted street of soft asphalt the clock that is the face of a giant flower, the center of the Sunflower Beer sign, says they are approaching four. They wait at the same corner, opposite the Phoenix Bar, where Harry's father customarily waits, and take the 16A bus to Mt. Judge. They are the only passengers; the driver tells them mysteriously, "They're about down." Up they go through the City Park, past the World War II tank and the bandshell and the tennis court, around the shoulder of the mountain. On one side of them, gas stations and a green cliff; on the other, a precipice and, distantly, a viaduct. As the kid gazes out the window, toward the next mountain over, Rabbit asks him, "Where did you go this morning? Tell me the truth."

The boy answers, finally. "Eisenhower Avenue."

"To see if Mommy's car was there?"

"I guess."

"Was it?"

"Yop."

"D'you go in?"

"Nope. Just looked up at the windows awhile."

"Did you know the number to look at?"

"One two oh four."

"That sounds right."

They get off at Central, beside the granite Baptist church, and walk up Jackson toward his parents' house. The streets haven't changed in his lifetime. They were built too close together for vacant lots and too solidly to tear down, of a reddish brick with purplish bruises in it, and a texture that as a child

Rabbit thought of as chapped, like his lips in winter. Maples and horse chestnuts darken the stumpy front lawns, hedged by little wired barricades of barberry and box. The houses are semidetached and heavy; their roofs are slate and their porches have brick walls, and above each door of oak and beveled glass winks a fanlight of somber churchly colors. As a child Rabbit imagined that fanlight to be a child of the windows above the Lutheran altar and therefore of God, a mauve and golden seeing sentinel posted above where he and Pop and Mom and Mim came and went a dozen times a day. Now, entering with his son, still too much a son himself to knock, he feels his parents' place as stifling. Though the clock on the living-room highboy says only 4:20, darkness has come: dark carpets, thick drawn drapes, dead wallpaper, potted plants crowding the glass on the side that has the windows. Mom used to complain about how they had the inside half of a corner house but when the Bolgers, their old neighbors, died, and their half went onto the market, they made no move to inquire after the price, and a young couple from Scranton bought it, the young wife pregnant and barefoot and the young husband something in one of the new electronics plants out along Route 422; and the Angstroms still live in the dark half. They prefer it. Sunlight fades. Space kills. They sent him, Harry, out in the world to shine, but hugged their own shadows here. Their neighbor house on the other side, across two cement sidewalks with a strip of grass between them, where lived the old Methodist Mom used to fight with about who would mow the grass strip, has had a FOR SALE sign up for a year. People now want more air and land than these huddled hillside neighborhoods can give them. The house smells to Rabbit of preservative: of odors filming other odors, of layers of time, of wax and Aerosol and death; of safety.

A shape, a shade, comes forward from the kitchen. He expects it to be his father, but it is his mother, shuffling, in a bathrobe, yet erect and moving. She leans forward unsmiling to accept his kiss. Her wrinkled cheek is warm; her hand steadying itself on his wrist is knobbed and cold.

"Happy birthday, Mom." He hugs the massager against his chest; it is too early to offer it. She stares at the package as if he had put a shield between them.

"I'm sixty-five," she says, groping for phrases so her sentences end in the middle. "When I was twenty. I told my boyfriend I wanted to be shot. When I was thirty." It is not so much the strange tremulous attempt of her lips to close upon a thought as the accompanying stare, an unblinking ungathering gaze into space, that lifts her eyes out of any flow and frightens Rabbit with a sense of ultimate blindness, of a blackboard from which they will all be wiped clean.

"You told Pop this?"

"Not your dad. Another. I didn't meet your dad till later. This other one, I'm glad. He's not here. To see me now."

"You look pretty good to me," Rabbit tells her. "I didn't think you'd be up."

"Nelson. How do I look. To you?" Thus she acknowledges the boy. She has always been testing him, putting him on the defensive. She has never forgiven him for not being another Harry, for having so much Janice in him. Those little Springer hands, she used to say. Now her own hands, held forgotten in front of her bathrobe belt, constantly work in a palsied waggle.

"Nice," Nelson says. He is wary. He has learned that brevity and promptness of response are his best defense.

To take the attention off the kid, Rabbit asks her, "Should you be up?"

She laughs, an astonishing silent thing; her head tips back, her big nose glints from the facets of its tip and underside, her hand stops wagging. "I know, the way Earl talks. You'd think from the way he wants me in bed. I'm laid out already. The doctor. Wants me up. I had to bake a cake. Earl wanted. One of those tasteless paps from the bakery. Where's Janice?"

"Yeah, about that. She's awfully sorry, she couldn't come. She had to go off with her mother to the Poconos, it took us all by surprise."

"Things can be. Surprising."

From upstairs Earl Angstrom's thin voice calls anxiously, with a wheedler's borrowed triumph, "They're down! Eagle has landed! We're on the moon, boys and girls! Uncle Sam is on the moon!"

"That's just. The place for him," Mom says, and with a rough gesture sweeps her distorted hand back toward her ear, to smooth down a piece of hair that has wandered loose from the bun she still twists up. Funny, the hair as it grays grows more stubborn. They say even inside the grave, it grows. Open coffins of women and find the whole thing stuffed like inside of a mattress. Pubic hair too? Funny it never needs to be cut. When he touches his mother's arm to help her up the stairs to look at the moon, the flesh above her elbow is disconcerting—loose upon the bone, as on a well-cooked chicken.

The set is in Mom's bedroom at the front of the house. It has the smell their cellar used to have when they had those two cats. He tries to remember their names. Pansy. And Willy. Willy, the tom, got in so many fights his belly began to slosh and he had to be taken to the Animal Rescue. There is no picture of the moon on the tube, just crackling voices while cardboard cutouts simulate what is happening, and electronic letters spell out who in the crackle of men is speaking.

"... literally thousands of little one and two foot craters around the area," a man is saying in the voice that used to try to sell them Shredded Ralston between episodes of Tom Mix. "We see some angular

blocks out several hundred feet in front of us that are probably two feet in size and have angular edges. There is a hill in view just about on the ground track ahead of us. Difficult to estimate, but might be a half a mile or a mile."

A voice identified as Houston says, "Roger, Tranquillity. We copy. Over." The voice has that Texas authority. As if words were invented by them, they speak so lovingly. When Rabbit was stationed at Fort Hood in '53, Texas looked like the moon to him, brown land running from his knees level as a knife, purple rumpled horizon, sky bigger and barer than he could believe, first time away from his damp green hills, last time too. Everybody's voice was so nice and gritty and loving, even the girls in the whorehouse.

A voice called Columbia says, "Sounds like a lot better than it did yesterday. At that very low sun angle, it looked rough as a cob then." As a cob? The electronic letters specify, MIKE COLLINS SPEAKING FROM COMMAND MODULE ORBITING MOON.

Tranquillity says, "It really was rough, Mike, over the targeted landing area. It was extremely rough, cratered and large numbers of rocks that were probably some many larger than five or ten feet in size." Mom's room has lace curtains aged yellowish and pinned back with tin daisies that to an infant's eyes seemed magical, rose-and-thorns wallpaper curling loose from the wall above where the radiator safety valve steams, a kind of plush armchair that soaks up dust. When he was a child this chair was downstairs and he would sock it to release torrents of swirling motes into the shaft of afternoon sun; these whirling motes seemed to him worlds, each an earth, with him on one of them, unthinkable small, unbearably. Some light used to get into the house in late afternoon, between the maples. Now the maples have thronged that light solid, made the room cellar-dim. The bedside table supports an erect little company of pill bottles and a Bible. The walls hold tinted photographs of himself and Mim in high school, taken he remembers by a pushy pudgy little blue-jawed crook who called himself a Studio and weaseled his way into the building every spring and made them line up in the auditorium and wet-comb their hair so their parents couldn't resist two weeks later letting them take in to the homeroom the money for an 8 by 10 tinted print and a sheet of wallet-sized grislies of themselves; now this crook by the somersault of time has become a donor of selves otherwise forever lost: Rabbit's skinny head pink in its translucent blond whiffle, his ears out from his head an inch, his eyes unreal blue as marbles, even his lower lids youthfully fleshy; and Mim's face plump between the shoulder-length shampoo-shining sheaves rolled under in Rita Hayworth style, the scarlet tint of her lipstick pinned like a badge on the starched white of her face. Both children smile out into space, through the crook's smudged lens, from that sweat-scented giggling gym toward their mother bedridden someday.

Columbia jokes. "When in doubt, land long." Tranquillity says. "Well, we did."

And Houston intervenes. "Tranquillity Houston. We have a P twenty-two update for you if you're ready to copy. Over."

Columbia jokes again: "At your service, sir."

Houston, unamused, a city of computers working without sleep, answers, "Right, Mike. P one one zero four thirty two eighteen; P two one zero four thirty-seven twenty-eight and that is four miles south. This is based on a targeted landing site. Over."

Columbia repeats the numbers.

Tranquillity says, "Our mission timer is now reading nine zero four thirty-four forty-seven and static."

"Roger, copy. Your mission timer is now static at—say again the time."

"Nine zero four thirty-four forty-seven."

"Roger, copy, Tranquillity. That gravity align looked good. We see you recycling."

"Well, no. I was trying to get time sixteen sixty-five out and somehow it proceeded on the six-twenty-two before I could do a BRP thirty-two enter. I want to log a time here and then I'd like to know whether you want me to proceed on torquing angles or to go back and re-enter again before torquing. Over."

"Rog, Buzz. Stand by."

Nelson and his grandfather listen raptly to these procedures; Mary Angstrom turns impatiently—or is it that her difficulty of motion makes all gestures appear impatient?—and makes her shuffling way out into the landing and down the stairs again. Rabbit, heart trembling in its hollow, follows. She needs no help going down the stairs. In the garishly bright kitchen she asks, "Where did you say. Janice was?"

"In the Poconos with her mother."

"Why should I believe that?"

"Why shouldn't you?"

She stoops over, waveringly, to open the oven and look in, tangled wire hair falling loose as she bends. She grunts, stands, and states, "Janice. Stays out of my way. These days."

In his frightened, hypnotized condition, Rabbit can only, it seems, ask questions. "Why would she do that?"

His mother states and stares, only a movement of her tongue between her parted lips betraying that she is trying to speak. "I know too much," she at last brings out, "about her."

Rabbit says, "You know only what a bunch of pathetic old gossips tell you about her. And stop bugging Pop about it, he comes into work and bugs me." Since she does not fight back, he is provoked to go on. "With Mim out turning ten tricks a day in Las Vegas I'd think you'd have more to worry about than poor Janice's private life."

"She was always," his mother brings out, "spoiled."

"Yes and Nelson too I suppose is spoiled. How would you describe me? Just yesterday I was sitting over at the Blasts game thinking what a lousy base-

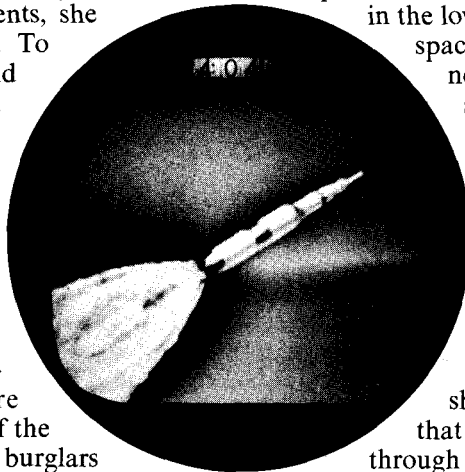
ball player I was, always scared of the ball. I'm a pretty poor husband, a sloppy father, and when the Verity Press folds I'll fold with it and have to go on welfare. Some life. Thanks, Mom."

"Hush," she says, expressionless, "you'll make. The cake fall," and like a rusty jackknife she forces herself to bend over and peer into the gas oven.

"Sorry, Mom, but Jesus I'm tired lately."

"You'll feel better when. You're my age."

The party is a success. They sit at the kitchen table with the four places worn through the enamel in all those years. It is like it used to be, except that Mom is in a bathrobe and Mim has become Nelson. Pop carves the chicken and then cuts up Mom's piece in small bits for her; her right hand can hold a fork but cannot use a knife. His teeth slipping down, he proposes a toast in New York State wine to "my Mary, an angel through thick and thin"; Rabbit wonders what the thin was. Maybe this is it. When she unwraps her few presents, she laughs at the massager. "Is this. To keep me hopping?" she asks, and has her husband plug it in, and rests it, vibrating, on the top of Nelson's head. He needs this touch of cheering up. Harry feels Janice's absence gnawing at him. When the cake is cut, the kid eats only half a piece, so Rabbit has to eat double to not hurt his mother's feelings. Dusk thickens: over in West Brewer the sanatorium windows are burning orange, and on this side of the mountain the shadows sneak like burglars into the narrow concrete space between this house and the unsold one. Through the papered walls, from the house of the young barefoot couple, seeps the dull bass percussion of a rock group, making the matched tins (cookies, sugar, flour, coffee) on Mom's shelf tingle in their emptiness. In the living room the glass face of the mahogany highboy shivers. Nelson's eyes begin to sink; his eyelids lower. His little button cupid-curved mouth smiles in apology as he slumps forward into the cold edge of the table. His elders talk about old times in the neighborhood, people of the thirties and forties, once so alive you saw them every day and never thought to take even a photograph. The old Methodist refusing to mow his half of the grass strip. Before him the Zims with that pretty daughter the mother would shriek at every breakfast and supper. The man down the street who worked nights at the pretzel plant and who shot himself one dawn with nobody to hear it but the horses of the milk wagon. They had milk wagons then. The streets were soft dust.



Nelson fights sleep. Rabbit asks him. "Want to head home?"

"Negative, Pop." He sleepily smiles at his own wit.

Rabbit extends the joke. "The time is twenty-one hours. We better rendezvous with our spacecraft."

But the spacecraft is empty: a long empty box in the blackness of Penn Villas, slowly spinning in the void, its border beds half-weeded. The kid is frightened to go home. So is Rabbit. They sit on Mom's bed and watch television in the dark. They are told the men in the big metal spider sitting on the moon cannot sleep, so the moon walk has been moved up several hours. Men in studios, pale and drawn from killing time, demonstrate with life-size mockups what is supposed to happen; on some channels men in space suits are walking around, laying down tinfoil trays as if for a cookout. At last it happens. The real event. Or is it? A television camera on the leg of the module comes on: an abstraction appears on the screen. The announcer explains that the blackness in the top of the screen is the lunar night, the blackness in the lower left corner is the shadow of the spacecraft with its ladder, the white-

ness is the surface of the moon. Nelson is asleep, his head on his father's thigh; funny how kids' skulls grow damp when they sleep. Like bulbs underground. Mom's legs are under the blankets; she is propped up on pillows behind him. Pop is asleep in his chair, his breathing a distant sad sea, touching shore and retreating, touching shore and retreating, an old pump that keeps going; lamplight sneaks through a crack in the windowshade and

touches the top of his head, his sparse hair mussed into lank feathers. On the bright box something is happening. A snaky shape sneaks down from the upper left corner; it is a man's leg. It grows another leg, eclipses the bright patch that is the surface of the moon. A man in clumsy silhouette has interposed himself among these abstract shadows and glare. He says something about "steps" that a crackle keeps Rabbit from understanding. Electronic letters traveling sideways spell out MAN IS ON THE MOON. The voice, crackling, tells Houston that the surface is fine and powdery, he can pick it up with his toe, it adheres to his boot like powdered charcoal, that he sinks in only a fraction of an inch, that it's easier to move around than in the simulations on the earth. From behind him, Rabbit's mother's hand with difficulty reaches out, touches the back of his skull, stays there, awkwardly tries to massage his scalp, to ease away thoughts of the trouble she knows he is in. "I don't know, Mom," he abruptly admits. "I know it's happened, but I don't feel anything yet." □

"I AM A MAID, AND WHAT DO I KNOW?"

A Portrait by Robert Coles, M.D.

There is no light when I get up. It is dark out, black as can be out. The worst thing in the day for me is my feet touching the floor. I hate it, I dread it, that moment. I get shivers up and down my body, way to my head, I tell you. Maybe it's the day ahead; maybe I'm shivering on that account.

But I get over my shivers. You have to get over your troubles. I have never been one to feel sorry for myself. What's the use? You feel sorry for yourself and start weeping for yourself and the next thing you know you're down and out. My daddy used to tell us: be a fighter, be like Joe Louis—hit back, hit back. Well, I've never hit anyone back in my whole life, but I can tell you, I try to hit back by getting up and doing my work, and not sitting back and saying Oh, my gosh, and Oh, my gosh, until I'm just so low in my spirits that I'm no good to anyone and no good to myself either.

I was telling you. I was saying. I get up. I'm over the shivers. I'm standing. I hear the creaks. Sometimes I hear the small creaks in the night when I'm lying there, and I've been visited by a dream and I'm awake: the rats, they won't let the floor rest. When I start moving, though, the creaks are big ones; I guess the floor is saying ouch, ouch, Mrs. Harold, go easy on me. Well, it's true: I weigh too much; I'm over two hundred, but I don't know how much over. When I went over two hundred, I said to myself: Dorrie Harold, you're big, you're tall, you work hard, and you have large bones, your daddy used to say, but there's a limit, and you've passed over the limit, and now it's time to stop adding on the weight—or else stop looking at the scale, even if she tells you to, that lady with scales all over her house. So, finally I told her, I said, Mrs. Albert: you're my boss. I clean

your house good. Don't I? I do everything I can to be of help. And I have this one thing I'd like to ask. You see, you can't have me weighing myself anymore. You just can't! And she said to me: Dorrie, I'll do anything, anything you want. So she stopped telling me I was free to use her scales. Of course all along, when she was telling me to cut down, cut down, she'd tell me in the next breath to go eat the cake that was left over. If you don't, Dorrie, I will, she'd tell me. So I'd eat the cake and I'd eat the leftovers from the night before and I'd eat the ice cream she had (for her kids, she always told me, as though I was checking up on her!), and the rolls, her big weakness, she keeps on saying, I'd eat them, too.

Meanwhile, she'd be riding on that bike she has in her room or doing her exercises—Canadian exercises or something, she calls them. God, she gets into positions. She plays the music and giggles to herself and throws herself all over and I hear bang, bang, bang on the floor. Once I came into her room and she was staring into the mirror and she was doing something awful, sinful it was, to her face. I thought to myself: Jesus Christ, Almighty God, what in hell is going on? I thought to myself: Dorrie Harold, she's gone and lost her mind, that Mrs. Albert has, and you'd better be careful, because there's no telling what she's liable to do. She looked like a lion; maybe a tiger. I don't know. I've never seen any of those wild animals. I've never been to a zoo in my entire life. But I said to myself, there she is, gone wild like a zoo, my own Mrs. Albert. Well, you know, it was her exercises, I found out. I guess I just stood there, unable to move; and she caught sight of me and she turned around and said, Dorrie, is there something the matter? and I said no, no, no. I guess she didn't believe me, be-

cause she told me she was doing some face exercises. I recovered myself, and I said oh, is that it, and then she said yes, that's it, and she turned back to the mirror and there it was again: her face. And I'll let you in on a secret: a month or so later she stopped them, the face exercises. She pulled a muscle under her chin, and Lord, she screamed and came running out of that room crying until I thought she might be getting ready to let go—I mean *really* let go. I had to get the doctor over. And I had to look at her. Oh, my God (I thought), what would You say if she left us, and she came up to see You in heaven looking like that, with a scary face on her and all that noise she can make! Dorrie, help me! Dorrie, call the doctor *again*! Dorrie, why isn't he here by now? Oh, Dorrie, why do I do all this? Why don't I just relax and eat, the way you do?

Finally the doctor came; it was only five or ten minutes, I believe, after we called. And he told her to relax and she'd be OK. He gave her a shot of something and she went and fell asleep, and lo and behold, when she woke up, she was all cured. She came running downstairs and told me I had to swear not to tell anyone, not her husband and not her daughter and not her son. I said I'd never say a word, of course. Then she said we had to celebrate. So she made us each a sundae: chocolate ice cream and chocolate sauce and nuts all over and marshmallow. I didn't fancy one, but I knew I'd better join her, so I ate mine and I saw out of the corner of my eye that she was up to her old tricks again, mixing that sundae up until she ruined it, poking at it, taking some to eat and then returning it instead of having it, cutting into the sauce with her spoon and lifting up a big helping, and then (dear God!) just sticking the whole thing back into the bowl with all her might, so that I thought for sure she was going to break the bowl and hurt herself real bad. I tried not to take notice. I tried not to look even a little at her. But I did, and she caught me. Then she said it: Oh, Dorrie, I'm not really hungry at all. Why don't you finish this? It's a shame to waste it, you know. And up she was, and out of sight. I thought to myself, like I always do: better to be sitting out in that house having a second helping than to be near death for lack of food, like once we all were when I was a kid. So I ate everything in her bowl; I cleaned it up real good. When I went to wash the dishes and wipe out all the "evidence," like she'll say sometimes, I heard her on the phone: it was a tennis game she was wanting to go play with someone.

That's a long way around, I know, to tell you about my weight, but like my momma would say to us when we were little: it's true, it's true. Early in the morning I hear the creaks on the floor and I think of her, Mrs. Albert. Come to think of it, I guess I never stop thinking about her. There I'll be, standing beside my bed and trying to pull my-

self into one piece, so I can get dressed and have my coffee and take a look at my children, even if they're asleep, and say good-bye to them without the creaks waking them. (They never wake up on time, even with the alarm clock.) And do you know what's crossing my mind? One minute it'll be that I've got to stop standing there near the bed and go get dressed; but the next thing I'll think is that she will want some job done today, and she will want some other job done, and she has her club over, and she has her car pool all week, and there's the course she takes, in a college. I never can keep track of her schedule. That's what she calls it, her schedule. She has a big calendar, and she's always writing things on it (her appointments she calls them) and telling me not to let her forget: Dorrie, keep it in mind, won't you? She tries to be so nice to me—and I guess that's why I'm trying for her when I stand beside that bed of mine, trying to figure out what in hell it is she's going to do today—and me, what I'll be doing.

But I have no long time for standing there. I go to the closet and I put on my dress. I put on my stockings. And the worst of it is that I put on my shoes. That *is* the worst, worse than waking up (I don't use an alarm, I don't have to) and worse than the shivers I get when I stand up. My feet hurt. They hurt when I take the shoes off and they hurt when I put the shoes on again. When I take the shoes off, I can hear my toes saying they'd like to stretch themselves good, but they're all doubled up. Then when I put the shoes on, my toes are aching and crying and saying, listen Dorrie, doesn't a day go by that you're not pushing on us to get into that little dark corner and stay there, all bent and hurting so bad. Well, every once in a while I give my feet a good talking-to, just like I used to hear my mother do. I say they could know worse, and they already have. What would it be like if I didn't have any shoes, and if we didn't have heat in the building here, and if I was walking all over and they'd be cut up, cut up real bad? This way they're sore, I know, but on Sunday I don't wear shoes for a minute, except when I go to church, and then I have my good shoes, special they are. (Of course, *they* hurt even worse, because they're meant to keep your feet looking as thin as possible.) I was sitting in church a Sunday back, and all of a sudden my feet were going to explode, I thought; and I said to myself I should go and ask Mrs. Albert if she knows any way I could exercise my feet. But I'd never speak up. I say a lot of things to her in my mind, but I never go any further. It's a long way from your thoughts to your words, my daddy told every one of us, and he knew what he was saying.

I'm out of my building by six o'clock at the latest. In the winter it's the middle of the night. It's light in the summer, I know, but I still feel like it's dark outside. I swear, it takes me half the morning to see the light of the day. I say good-bye in a whisper to each of my three girls and to my boy, and I close the door as real quietlike as I can, and I test it, to see if it'll

open—and then I’m gone. I’ve got a cup of coffee in me, and that’s what I need to find my way down the stairs and into the street. (Even if it’s noon, it’s dark as can be in our building’s hall.) Then I walk. I walk five blocks. I know the walk by heart. I guess I half sleep sometimes as I walk, because you know what? I’ll catch myself sitting in the bus and have no memory of walking to the bus or getting on the bus or sitting down in my seat. Can you believe it? I get scared when that happens. I asked her, Mrs. Albert, about it one day, and she said that she could understand how I feel, because she’ll be in her art class, and the man says something and she doesn’t hear him. She says it’s “tuning out.” She says your mind isn’t happy where it is, so it goes someplace else. I believe that’s what she said. It’s hard keeping track of her meaning sometimes.

She’s a fast one, that Mrs. Albert. It takes me over an hour to get to her house, an hour and a half a lot of the time. She has me come early, so I can help her with the breakfast. She says she hates to make breakfast, because it’s boring and it’s no challenge, she says. So I’ll be cooking their breakfast and getting them off to school, her girl and her boy. Her husband eats his breakfast later in the day at his office. I’m not sure, but I think he does. He has one cup of coffee, just like I do, then he leaves. He takes the paper with him. They get two copies of the same paper, one for her and one for him to take and read in his office. He’s got a factory, I think. He makes dresses maybe, or shirts, or something like that. And his brother is a lawyer, and they’re always talking about making money and losing money and borrowing money and loaning it and everything. Everyone has to think about money, even them!

I told you she is fast and smart. I’ll get there, and it’s a little after seven, sometimes half past. She’s supposed to be asleep. I have my key. I come in and I try to be quiet, even though I know the two kids are up, waiting for me to give them a couple of pushes. They just won’t come down to breakfast until I go to get them. How do you like that? So, I go. I guess she’s trained them to wait and be called, and it’s up to me. She’s pretending to sleep, I’ll be thinking. I’ll get them down and I’m giving their father his black coffee, and them their juice and their eggs and cereal and milk and toast. I’m doing the best I can to keep them all happy. Some marmalade, Dorrie. More toast, Dorrie! Can I have another glass of milk? They ask and I go get for them. Their father is a gentleman, though; he’d pour his own coffee if I let him. But so long as I’m in the kitchen neither of those children would go do a thing for themselves. Mrs. Albert says it’s like with me, they get distracted, and they forget to do things, so they have to be reminded. But thank God, they’re all gone by eight. He drives off and they get picked up by someone else—except when it’s their mother’s turn to take them all to school, and then don’t even ask me what goes on. It’s a bad week, and it’s the week I have to get up at five

o’clock, at least half an hour or more earlier than usual.

But most weeks I’m the one who sees them leave the house; then I’m supposed to clean up after them and start cleaning the other rooms, and, of course, wait for her. She’s asleep, you might think. There hasn’t been a sound out of her while the others are up and washing and dressing and down here eating their breakfast. But no, as soon as his car leaves and the kids have closed the front door and are waiting outside to be picked up—then, quick as lightning she rings for me. I’m always right there, because by now I know her real good. Dorrie, she’ll be saying to me, I’m so tired, but I musn’t waste the whole day. Would you please bring me the paper and some coffee? I need my coffee. Then while I’m getting her the coffee she’s quick to sit up and she puts on the television and she’s waiting for the tray. We do the same thing every day, but she just won’t let me bring her the coffee until she rings and I hear her little speech: good morning, good morning, and how are *you*, Dorrie, and isn’t it a lovely day, except she’s still tired, or isn’t it a terrible day, and on top of that she’s tired.

I help her get over being tired. She wakes up after her coffee, and then she’s on the go. She tries to decide what she’s going to wear. Sometimes the weather outside isn’t the weather the paper says we’re going to have, so she asks me what I think. I tell her there’s nothing like opening the window or the door and finding out for yourself. After she’s got herself all washed and she’s done her exercising, she’s ready to come down and do her telephoning. She has her friends and she has to speak with them. She wants more coffee. She tells me to get something started for supper, if it’s going to take a long time to cook, and to do the cleaning and all that. She’s one that likes to tell you what to do, even if you know yourself. Sometimes she’ll have her free time, she calls it. She reads books and magazines. She’ll be reading something and you hear her saying things: I agree; I disagree; oh, no! and oh, that’s right! She says she’s a great friend of ours, the Negro people. She’ll write out a check to someone, and she’ll tell me the money is going to help my people. I always thank her.

If she’s going to stay at home for lunch, I have to give her the cottage cheese and all that. Lord, I don’t know how she does it. She’s got a little thing in her study and she clicks it and clicks it, and it tells her how many of those calories she’s had and how many she’ll be having—for her supper, you know. Then she’ll tell me she can’t fit into something, and I’ll look and see she’s put on some weight around the middle. Once I was cleaning her bureau and I opened the drawer and there they were under a sweater, M&M chocolate candy, just like my girls like to pop down. You start with them and you can’t stop.

I have to answer the phone. She likes for me to say: Albert residence. Then I’m to say that I’ll go and see if she’s at home, even if I know she is, and

“I Am a Maid, and What Do I Know?”

even if she's standing but a little bit away from me. Sometimes her husband calls her, and I hear her saying that she's got a busy day, and she's trying to get everything straightened out, and she'll survive, so don't worry. Then she'll hang up and go back to her coffee. And she'll be yawning. And she'll be singing—"Hello, Dolly" is her favorite. She says when she's one hundred she'll be singing that song. She sings when she gets dressed and she sings when she changes—from the pants she wears in the morning to her luncheon dress, she'll call it. She has special clothes for painting; they're supposed to be OK if you get the paint on, but she tries to be careful. Don't ask me what it is she paints. It's a big mess, I'll tell you that. I've tried to figure out what she's doing, but I can't. I just can't.

The worst time is when the kids come home. I'm the only one here. She's out doing something. Her husband, he certainly isn't going to be home until much later. Those kids are grumpy. They want attention. Dorrie, where is this? Dorrie, tell me where to go find that. Dorrie, Dorrie, Dorrie—until I could take both of them over my knee and spank them hard. Then their mother comes home and she asks them if everything is OK, and they say yes, and she asks me, and I say yes, and to myself I shake my head.

I wonder sometimes about white children, I'll be honest and say it to you: I worry. There's that girl of hers, Carolyn, and the boy, Peter. I feel sorry for them. They're lost little children; I mean it. You know, before they got me, they brought over people from foreign countries, their mother told me. Lord, I've heard her list the countries, but I forget—I think there was Scotland and Norway. The girls, she calls them, came and lived for a year. I guess they took care of the little kids while she and her husband went away and traveled all over the world. They were good girls, she'll tell you. They did right by her children, she'll tell you. But I don't think she's half as sure of herself as she sounds. It's funny; sometimes she'll tell me she wished that maybe she'd only had one person with them, and not four or five, and she wished it was me. But I tell her I couldn't ever go and leave my children to stay all night someplace else. Then she says yes, she knows; and then she'll ask me how I treat them, my children. I tell her I treat them real good, like a mother. On my tongue I'll be ready to say that I'd be a lot better mother if I could stay home and give my kids breakfast and be with them when they get home from school, but you know, if I said that I'd be asking her to discharge me, and that would be bad, because I'd have no money. My husband is sick in the hospital with bad lungs, tuberculosis. How could I live if I didn't work? How could my children eat? How could I pay the rent? How could I get us clothes? And I'll tell you something else: if Mr. Harold was to die tomorrow (he might go

any day the doctors keep warning me) and if I could go and get relief money from someone in the city, I'd still be right here working. I've never taken a cent of money from anyone that I didn't work for, nor has my husband all during his life—no, sir, not a cent. I never will.

I can't put my finger on what's the trouble with Carolyn and Peter. The girl is twelve; the boy is eight. I like them. They want me to wait on them, and that's what I'm there to do, I guess. They seem as if they don't know what to do next, because there's so much they have to do. Carolyn has her ballet lessons. She'll tell me one day she wants to be dancing all her life, the ballet. I see her moving all over the place on her tiptoes, and it's not exercising she's doing, like her mother does. The girl wants to paint, like her mother. She says she'd like her mother to build them a huge place, and they could go and paint and paint. She asked me what I thought. I said that I hoped she got what she wanted, and I hoped she learned how to draw good pictures. Well, she got all high and mighty on me and told me that she wasn't going to do anything like that, because today a good artist doesn't bother with pictures. They do *designs*, she called them. I don't know what she's talking about. I've seen her, helping her mother in the basement. They walk all over the place, putting paint here and there, and when they're through I catch a look and I say, Jesus Christ, our Savior. I asked my minister if it's true that something can go to your head and mix you up and make you do that; because, you know, it's not like Mrs. Albert to be pushing paint all over and end up with no picture. Her husband told his friend that he has to live with those pictures, but if he had his way, he'd have them hanging in the garage. I heard him on the phone.

The girl isn't too nice to the boy. Peter is a sorry child; that's what my mother would be calling him if she was alive and if she could look at him. He's been passed from woman to woman to take care of him, and he's scared I'll leave; he told me so. His mother told me a long time ago, a year ago, that she has some kind of *problem* with him. I have a problem with the boy, she announced to me one morning, and I started to shake. I thought: oh, my God, what has happened to the poor little one? But she told me it was in her mind, and it's got to his mind, too; so she goes to a doctor and he tells her what is right and wrong, you know. She was trying to tell me some more, and I was trying to be as good at understanding as I could, but then she told me there was no use, and she wasn't even sure she knew what was the trouble herself, except that the poor boy used to go and hit other kids, and the teacher said he was fresh as could be, mean even. I've never seen him like that, not once. I told Mrs. Albert that. She said she knew he wouldn't be mean with me; it's just the other kids, and I guess his teacher, that he's mean to. I guess he was even mean to his mother. I told Mrs. Albert again: he's good with me, and he used to hold

my hand real tight when I took him out for a walk, and even now he asks me if I'm coming back after my day off and if I'll stay next year. And when she and her husband go away on a trip and the grandmother comes to stay with them at night, the kids are especially good to me, and that little Peter, he'll come up to me, no kidding, and tell me I'm a real good cook, and he's sure glad to have me here. Well, I just take that boy around and give him a big kiss, and he'll be beaming right into my eyes.

Once Mr. and Mrs. Albert asked me if there was something they could both do for the colored people. They said they wanted to do more than give money. She said she'd like to give an afternoon of her time. He said he's too busy and he doesn't get home until seven o'clock at night, but he'd be happy if his wife could do something good, and maybe on Saturday afternoon he could come over and help out. I didn't know what to say. I didn't even know what they were talking about. I kept on saying, yes, yes, and yes, ma'am, and yes, sir. I told them please to give me a few days and I would have an answer if I could find one. You know what I was thinking? I was thinking to myself: God bless our reverend minister, Mr. Lawson. He'll help me out. So, after church on Sunday I asked him if I could please talk with him, just for a minute. He said yes, and he took me to the back of the church and I told him. He didn't say anything for the longest time, and I thought he was plain stumped—and of all people, Mr. Lawson! Then he told me something. He said: you go tell your people out in the big house that there *is* a way they can help us. They can keep on doing all they're doing, donating money, but as far as coming here on Saturday afternoon is concerned, we don't need them. You can tell them that the best way they can help us is to stay home on Saturday afternoon and be with their kids, so they'll bring up better kids.

I was surprised. I didn't see what he meant. I said to him: Reverend Mr. Lawson, I know that you're right, I just know you are. But if the Alberts help their kids to be better, I'm not sure how that will help us over here. Well, he told me right away. He said there are too many white people coming around here and trying to help us, and telling us how to do everything, and saying we're in a bad way; and meanwhile, just take a look at *them*. *They're* in a bad way. They're all messed up. They go around feeling sorry for us, but with all their money and everything, they have kids who are crying all the time and mean as can be and getting into trouble, and all that. Mr. Lawson said if they'd bring up better kids, the country would be better; and then we'd have it better over here where we live.

I told him I didn't know how I was going to tell the Alberts, tell them his message. He said just to go tell them. I said no. And I didn't. I'd be fired. I'm no fool. Mr. Lawson, he's a preacher. He can go and say those things; but not me. I told Mr. and Mrs. Albert that I'd been thinking, and I couldn't come up with something for them to do, but I was sure there was something, and as soon as I find it out, I'll tell them. They didn't seem to mind that I'd failed them. Mrs. Albert thanked me just the same for trying, and she told me later that she was just as glad that Mr. Albert was going to have his Saturday afternoons free from now on through the summer, because he needed to exercise, just like she needs to, and maybe now he'd go and play golf for three or four hours and he'd lose that little rubber tire he's getting, she calls it, around his stomach. Then he would look ten years younger, and that would be good for his mind, and it would help him in his business, too, she said. Isn't that right, Dorrie, she asked me, like always, and I said I'm a maid and what do I know; but she's right, I do know that. And she said I was real good to say so. □

INTO THE FUTURE

Standing here just short of the corner
I grope by my side with fingertips
Against the rasping surface of brick.
If it had handholds I would hang on.
One move could ruin everything.
They would find my blood running down the wall.

In city times like these
One never retraces steps. Forward
Is the only direction. Beyond this corner
The wind gusts cold, coughing wave-
Whirls of dust along Michigan Avenue.
If I let go and turn the corner
What will come at me from my blind side?
A newspaper clutches at my leg and forces me on.

by Peter Davison



The sun does lovely things in Bermuda.

It plays on the sea around us, painting an exquisite water colour. On land, it brings out the best in our coral-pink beaches, not to mention a surrounding flush of floral hues.

But best of all, for people who may miss their summer vacations, it stays late into November. You can summer here in Fall while enjoying another kind of warmth that's always here.

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This Fall, come to where you can still find Summer. To Bermuda, 90 minutes near.



Ber

For a change, come to where things haven't changed.

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NAJARI LEVON'S OLD COUNTRY ADVICE TO THE YOUNG AMERICANS ON HOW TO LIVE WITH A SNAKE

A story by William Saroyan

Najari Levon went to Aram's house on Van Ness Avenue for some legal advice about a private matter, but Aram hadn't come home yet, so the old man with the gargoyle face was asked to make himself at home somewhere.

He saw Aram's two small sons and two small daughters on the linoleum floor of a glassed-in porch, playing a board game and keeping score on a small pad with a small pencil, and so he went there and sat down to watch.

A metal arrow at the center of the large board was spun, and if it stopped in the space where there was a picture of a bright star, for instance, the player was given ten points, but just beside the picture of the star, there was a space in which there was a picture of a small green snake, and if the needle stopped there, ten points were taken away from the player's score.

The scorekeeper was Aram's firstborn, a boy of ten or eleven.

"Star," Aram's secondborn, a daughter, said, but the scorekeeper told his sister the needle was on the *line*, and *nearer* to the snake than to the star.

"Snake," he said, picking up the small pencil to put the score on the pad. His sister knocked the pad and pencil out of his hand, saying, "Star." And they began to fight.

Najari Levon said in Armenian, "In our house in Bitlis lived a very large black snake, which was our family snake."

The fighters stopped to listen, and he said, "No proper family was without its proper snake. A house was not complete without a snake, because the long snake crawling back of the walls held the house together."

The fighters relaxed, and he said, "Our snake had great wisdom. It was the oldest house snake in Bitlis."

The scorekeeper sprawled belly down on the floor, not far from the corner of the room where the small pencil had fallen during the fight.

"Did you *see* the snake?" he said.

The storyteller glanced at the small green pencil and then at the boy, and he said, "Yes, I saw the snake. His door into the house was at the top of the stone wall in the room where I slept, a door just big enough for the snake to pass through, about the size

of a saucer. In the evening as soon as I got into my bed, I looked up at the snake's door, and there I would see him looking down at me."

"*How much* of him would you see?"

"Only the head, because it was nighttime now, and he would soon go to sleep, too."

"Did you ever see *all* of him?"

"Oh, yes."

"How big was he?"

"As big around as a saucer, with a very sensitive face, very large eyes—not the little eyes of English people, but the large eyes of Armenian people. And Kurdish people. And a very thoughtful mouth, like the mouth of John D. Rockefeller, but of course with a different kind of tongue, although I can't be sure of this, because I have seen in a newspaper only a picture of John D. Rockefeller, but not a picture of his tongue."

"Did you see the snake's tongue?"

"Many times, in and out, like words, but of course in his own language, not ours."

"How long was he?"

"Ten times the length of a walking stick. He was not small."

"What would he do back there?"

"He lived there. His house was on that side of the stone wall, our house was on our side. But of course there was no such thing as his and ours. The whole house was ours and the whole house was his, but he *lived* back of the wall. In the wintertime I would not see him, and I would almost forget he was there. And then one evening in the springtime I would look up at his door, and there he would be again. He would speak, but I would say, 'Not now, because it's night and time to sleep, but in the morning come down and I will bring you something to eat.' So in the morning . . ."

"What did he eat?"

"Milk. In the morning I filled a bowl with milk—not one of those little bowls soup is served in for a small man, but one of those large bowls for a large man. My mother asked where I was taking the bowl of milk, and I said, 'Mama, I am taking the bowl of milk to the snake.' Everybody in our family, every man, every woman, and every child comes to my room to see the snake, because to have a snake in a

house is barakat. Everybody stands in the room and waits to see the snake. Thirty-three men, women, and children, instead of thirty-four, because during the winter my grandfather Setrak died."

"Did the snake come out?" the boy sprawled on the floor said.

"I took the bowl of milk, and put it in the corner straight across from the snake's door so that all of the snake would be able to come out of the door, down the wall, and across the floor. And then the thirty-three of us would be able to see *all* of the snake, from the head with the mouth like John D. Rockefeller's mouth, and with the eyes that are not the little eyes of English people, but the large eyes of Armenian people, and Kurdish people. I put the bowl down and look up at the snake's door, but the snake is not there, so I speak to the snake, I say to him, 'Sevavor, I have put the bowl of milk on the floor in the corner of the room, so come out of your door and down the wall and across the floor and have something to eat; it is no longer wintertime, it is springtime.'"

"Did he come down?"

"The snake came to the door to see who it was who was speaking to him, he came to see, he came to see who it was, was it me or was it somebody else, so when he came to see, I said, 'Don't worry, Sevavor, it is me, Levon, your friend. I am the one who is speaking, Najari Levon.' The snake looked at me, and then he looked at each of the others in the room, but he did not come down, the snake did not come down because we had been thirty-four and now were thirty-three, so the snake did not come down. I said, 'Sevavor, in the wintertime my grandfather Setrak died—that is why we are no longer thirty-four, we are now only thirty-three, but two of the wives are pregnant and in August we will be more than thirty-four, we will be thirty-five, and if one of the wives has twins, we will be thirty-six, and if both of the wives have twins, we will be thirty-seven, the Najari people will be thirty-seven, Sevavor, so come out of the door, and down the wall, and across the floor to the bowl of milk in the corner.'"

"Did he?"

"Very slowly, like this, like my arm, the snake came out of the door, slowly, down the wall, like this, one walking-stick length of the black body like this, slowly, down the wall, two walking-stick lengths, very hungry, very old, very wise, three walking-stick lengths, very black, four lengths, five lengths, six lengths, and now the snake's head is on the floor like this, but his tail is still behind the wall, and all of the Najari people are watching and waiting, and slowly the snake pushes himself forward on the floor a little nearer to the bowl of milk in the corner, seven lengths out of the door, seven lengths down the wall, eight lengths, nine lengths, and now all thirty-three of the Najari people are almost not breathing, to see better the Najari snake, the snake of the Najari people, from the head to the tail, and now there is only one more length. As soon as the snake moves

one more length toward the bowl of milk in the corner, every man, woman, and child in the room will see *all* of the snake of our house, of our family, of the Najari people. But the snake stops. With only one more length to go the black snake moving to the white bowl of milk in the corner stops."

"Why?" the boy said, and the storyteller said, "An old snake who does not see an old man in the springtime because the old man is dead, an old snake who does not see an old man he saw in the summertime, because in the wintertime the old man died, an old snake stops to think about a thing like that. I said, 'Sevavor, do not be unhappy about my grandfather Setrak who died in the cold of wintertime; it is good for an old man to go to sleep in the snow, it is good for him to go home; if nobody went to sleep, if nobody went home, the house would soon be crowded and there would not be food enough for everybody. Do not be sorry for the old man, he is asleep, he has gone home, go and have the milk I have put in the bowl for you.'"

"Did he go?"

"The snake did not move, the black snake with his head and two walking-stick lengths on the floor, and seven lengths up the wall, and one length behind the wall, did not move, because when my grandfather Setrak was born the snake saw him, and every year of Setrak's life the snake saw him, but now the old man was dead, and the snake was on his way to the bowl of milk in the corner, but the snake did not want to move anymore and all of the Najari people did not want to breathe. I said, 'Sevavor, do not worry about the old man, he is home, he is asleep, he is a small boy again running in the meadows, go and have your milk.' And then the snake, slowly, like a big black snake with eyes not like the little eyes of English people . . ."

"Yes, yes," the boy said. "Don't stop."

The old storyteller glanced at the small stub of green pencil on the floor, and then back at the boy, directly this time, scaring him a little, and then in English he said, "Dat your pencil?"

At that moment Aram came in and said, "What is it, Levon?"

The old man got up and chuckled deeply in the manner for which he was famous all over Fresno, and he said, "Aram Sevavor, I came for advice about a private matter, I came all the way from my house on L Street to your house on Van Ness Avenue, past the place where they have those red fire engines, all the way up Eye Street, where the police have their building, all the way up Forthcamp Avenue, I came, Aram Sevavor, one foot after the other, from my house to your house. I came, and now I go, I go all the way back, Aram Sevavor, because I can't remember the question I came to ask."

He went out the back, and down the alley, and the boy with the green pencil stood in the alley and watched him go, taking with him forever the end of the story about the snake. □

STARTING TO WRITE: PARIS, 1921

by V. S. Pritchett

“A writer is, at the very least, two persons.” Mr. Pritchett tells how he entered into the pain and pleasure of the double life.

This is the year of my seventieth birthday, a fact that bewilders me. I find it hard to believe. I understand now the look of affront I often saw in my father’s face after this age and that I see in the faces of my contemporaries. We are affronted because, whatever we may feel, time has turned us into curiosities in some secondhand shop. We are haunted by the suspicion that the prayers we did not know we were making have been only too blatantly answered.

I have before me two photographs. One is, I regret, instantly recognizable: a bald man, sitting before a pastry board propped on a table and writing. He does little else besides sit and write. His fattish face is supported by a valance of chins; the head is held together by glasses that slip down a bridgeless nose that spreads its nostrils over a moustache. He is trying to find some connection with the figure in another picture taken fifty years ago. He knows that the young fellow sitting on the table of a photographer’s in Paris, a thin youth of twenty with thick fairish hair, exclaiming eyebrows, loosely grinning mouth, and the eyes raised to the ceiling with a look of passing schoolboy saintliness, is himself. The young one is shy, careless, very pleased with himself, putting on some impromptu act; the older one is perplexed. The two, if they could meet in the flesh, would be stupefied, and the older one would certainly be embarrassed.

To write about one’s childhood is comparatively simple. One’s life has a natural defining frame. One knows who one is; in childish egotism, one supposes people have a relationship only with oneself. But after the age of twenty, the frame is uncertain, change is hard to pin down, one is less and less sure of who one is, and other egos with their court of adherents



The author in Paris, 1921

invade one's privacy with theirs. One's freedom is inhibited by their natural insistence on themselves; also, the professional writer who spends his time becoming other people and places, real or imaginary, finds he has written his life away and has become almost nothing. The true autobiography of this egotist is exposed in all its intimate foliage in his work. But there is a period when a writer has not yet become one, or just having become one, is struggling to form his talent, and it is of this period that I write. It is a selection, and it is neither a confession nor a literary reminiscence, but as far as I am able I have put in my "truth."

I am not sure whether I should describe myself as an egotist or an egoist. The distinction is subtle and important; I am forced to use the personal pronoun and would do anything, if I could, to avoid it here. I am not a public figure. I would almost prefer to use the pronoun "we" rather than "I"—and I do not mean in the editorial or royal sense—and there is a strong argument for doing so. For a writer is, at the very least, two persons. He is the prosaic man at his desk and a sort of valet who dogs him and does the living. There is a time when he is all valet looking for a master—that is, the writer he is hopefully pursuing.

When I got out of the train in the early spring of 1921 at the Gare du Nord, I was all valet: the master was no more than a wish or a dream, and it would be a long time before the two would be united to each other. To find the writer, the valet had decided that he must break with his family and with everything and everyone he knew and go to France, a common opinion in the twenties. In my case, this would be a remedy for what I foolishly thought was my fatal disadvantage: lack of education. I had little romping notion of "seeing the world"; in a disorderly way I quite seriously wished to be taught. The petty aspect of the drama could be detected by the anxious way I kept on touching three of my pockets as I followed the porter who was carrying my heavy leather suitcase to the barrier. I had £20 divided between them. This sum, one could tell from my frightened eyes, had got to last forever, and the word "forever" was like a sustaining tune running through my head. If it did not last forever, I would be back in London with my tail between my legs; back on a stool in the leather trade. They used stools in those days.

Two things stick in my mind when I look back upon that arrival. First, the sight of Sacré-Coeur on its hill just before the train got in. White and Byzantine, this prosperous church looked like some harsh oriental bird with a large eye just below the dome—as it appeared in the afternoon light—a hard eye that cynically regarded the sins of Paris and made no comment. The second sight was alarming until I got used to seeing it all over the walls of Paris: the huge word *Défense*, followed later by the words *Loi de* and some nineteenth-century date. I would have to live carefully.

The bid for freedom was not as bold as I needed to think it. I would not have got away so easily if a Mr. Hotchkiss, a member of my father's church in Bromley, had not happened to be in Paris doing the books of an Anglo-French company. He met me at the barrier and carried me off in a taxi, while the rue Lafayette rocked alongside and the disturbing dome of Sacré-Coeur reappeared up the hill in side streets. We arrived at the Hôtel Chatham. I was a little ashamed that Mr. Hotchkiss carried a Baedeker. He was a man with heavy plodding boots and a long face, like Jouvet's, who knew his way about. He had the not uncommon English art of pretending to be stupid and then giving a shy, comic side-glance, a dry affectionate fellow, but with his cranky side. He stayed at the Chatham because English painters used to stay there, years before. He used to be a Tolstoyan. He had given that up now, but I had seen the complete works in his house, and I had one memorable chat with him in Bromley about Russian literature; when I left I wished, for a while, that he were my father. The idea had to be dismissed: his wife was a shouting woman (from South Africa, I believe), who sounded as if she were calling the cattle in. You could hear her far down the street, where no one shouted. We used to say, "There goes Mrs. H. calling the cattle off the veldt." If she caught me coming back from the station in Bromley, she would make me carry a pile of broken boxes containing damaged fruit she had bought cheap in Covent Garden; and on our way, her quick eyes would look for bits of wood in the street or in people's front gardens. If she saw any, she would give one of her shouts and make me run in and get it. Very humiliating if you were wearing a bowler hat. She was a good-natured woman, but economical. Her husband was a frugal man too. We dined at Duval's that evening. Mr. Hotchkiss told me that the Duval restaurants belonged to the Paris of Arnold Bennett. They were safe, respectable places and, he said, inexpensive. The waitresses were middle-aged women who wore long starched white aprons that came up to their chins, and had been chosen for their plain faces. Here I saw my first pepper mill, ate my first *omelette fines herbes*, drank my second glass of wine. Mr. Hotchkiss drank a glass, too; he would not have dared to drink a glass in Bromley in the presence of a member of our sect. It was forbidden. He carefully calculated my share of the cost of the dinner at Duval's, and I admired his scrupulous behavior. My father would have largely put the amount down to expenses and charged someone else for it, in a generous way, which would lead to trouble the next day. But Mr. Hotchkiss went one better. We got out into the rue de Rivoli, where I was taking in yet another breath of the Paris night air. It was like one's first cool smell of the sea, but a sea made lightly of Gauloises, coffee, scent, and castrol. As we stood there, a lady of the French Red Cross who was collecting money for the French wounded in the 1914 war

appealed to us. Mr. Hotchkiss' big droll eyes went dead with patriotism.

"Noos avongs no blessays ah noo," he said, and walked off.

"Money is all they think of," he said.

Fifteen years later when my father's business went bankrupt, my father shrewdly called in Mr. Hotchkiss to "wind up" the firm, and when the job was done, refused to pay him the usual fee on the grounds that they belonged to the same church. Mr. Hotchkiss, who had admired my father for years, could not believe this betrayal and wept when he told my brother about it. Soon after the poor good man died.

I was shocked by the accent of Mr. Hotchkiss. I was already an accent snob, hot on vowels and the French "r." We walked back to the hotel, and outside a gaudily lit shop window a girl accosted us. My heart raced, my body iced and then became boiling hot, for she looked like a pink-faced angel with eyes like blue crystals. Her eyes and voice made my skin prickle.

"Did you see that girl?" I said, swaggering, putting on an air of experience, to see how she would affect a member of our church.

"You'll see a lot," he grunted. I had grown a year older.

My father's friend lived for tasks. In England in his spare time he liked making brass rubbings of the tombs in Norman churches. On our second day I went up in his esteem by saying I must find a cheaper hotel to live in. Eagerly he found me a much cheaper hotel near the Champ-de-Mars, and then we went to the Invalides, and reading from the Baedeker, looked down at Napoleon's tomb. He discussed Tolstoy's opinion of Napoleon and Napoleon's Paris. He was a good guide.

I was sure that my father would have told Mr. Hotchkiss that I was being sent to Paris for a few weeks to "learn the language" and go into the textile trade. So I told Mr. Hotchkiss that this was not so. I was going to stay "forever" in Paris, or at any rate I was going to travel from country to country all over the world, and I intended to be a writer. Mr. Hotchkiss said thoughtfully that this was exactly what I should do.

"But Father is against it," I said.

Mr. Hotchkiss thought a long time, and then said, "You should do what you want to do." The next day, after taking me up the Eiffel Tower, Mr. Hotchkiss left.

In our family, as I have told, we lived an isolated life. No friend ever came to the house, not even Mr. Hotchkiss. Father always said he had no time for people. We had to ask permission to see our friends, and that was rarely given; and if it was, we had to dress up in our best clothes. "Is your own fam-

ily not good enough for you?" was the piercing question. My earliest pleasure was therefore in being alone; and to be alone in Paris, knowing nobody, was an intoxication; it was like being on the dizzy brink of knowing everybody. I felt I was drinking the lights of the city and the words I heard spoken by passersby. After Mr. Hotchkiss had gone, I walked to the Place de la Concorde, and there by the bridge in the shade of the warm trees, looked over the stone wall into the river. I was instantly under a spell. The water looked still, yet it rustled like a dress. I had never seen water and stone in such pleasant conversation, the stone moonish, shading to saffron like the cheese of Brie, the water womanish and velvet. My solemn young eyes were seeing order and feeling united. I was so moved that I could feel myself grow into a new being. I repeated to myself my vow—for I was at the vowing age—never to leave France, and I was so entranced that tears came to my eyes. I walked from bridge to bridge along the Seine, past the acacias, the poplars, and the planes that leaned with a graceful precision over the water, each tree like the stroke of a painter's brush. The orderliness of the trees, the gravely spaced avenues, rearranged my mind. My English feeling was for Wordsworthian nature; here nature had been civilized. I was shocked and converted in an hour, and though later in life I have often lapsed, the conversion has remained. It was exasperating that I was followed by a couple of boys who jeered, "Look at the Englishman, oh, yes, oh, yes"—exasperating because at school I had won a prize for French but could hardly tell them I had read Molière, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, or Balzac; that given time I could tactlessly recite from Victor Hugo's *Les Châtiments*, beginning with: "*Waterloo, Waterloo, morne plaine*," and was in the middle of Anatole France. It was annoying. Language and the sound of words had been my obsession from childhood; the pursed or the open subtlety of French vowels, the nasal endings, the tongue slipping along over silk and metal, the juiciness of the subjunctive, made my own lips restless. My ear was good, if my grammar was bad. As I walked I repeated to myself the names of the shops: *quincaillerie, boulangerie, bouquiniste*, even the horrific words "*voies urinaires*" plastered over the buildings, and any phrase I overheard. But the word that had an overwhelming beauty for me was "*cinquième*": my room was on that floor in the hotel. What significance "*cinquième*" had. Its meaning was liberty.

I did have two introductions to people in Paris. My father had had ambitions to enter the perfumery trade, and in fact he had once set fire to the top floor of his premises in Middle Street while experimenting with essences—boiling them, I suppose. Anyway, that narrow street was soon glorious with fire engines: a District Call, he boasted when he came home bandaged. He had given me an in-

trodition to a scent-maker and also to a Christian Science lady. The scent man lived in the Faubourg Poissonnière. He asked me to lunch at his flat. (I was to spend nearly two years in Paris, but I think I was briefly invited only three times to the house of a French family.) This gentleman had a reddish moustache and lived in a spacious and dowdy place of polished floors and gilded furniture. The floor polish had a sickly smell. All the family were at lunch. His wife, a cheerful woman, stood scooping out soup at the end of the table and passed it to her two daughters, their husbands, her son, and the rest of us. One of the sons-in-law was a young officer in the army, full of wine and butter. He was in uniform. They were all shouting and laughing most of the time, especially at me. I could not understand much of what they said, and my grammar made them throw down their table napkins and shout with merriment. At every half sentence they corrected my genders. I was unlucky enough to defend myself by saying I had trouble with my "*gendres*." Screams of laughter. Lunch was a withering lesson at school.

The father stopped them at last and said:

"There is only one solution. You must get a 'sleeping dictionary,' " and this started the warm-eyed girls off again.

"Do you know what that is?" the father asked me.

"Yes."

"Ah," shouted the soldier. "He is making progress already." This started the girls again.

After lunch the son took me into a small salon with gilt cabinets in it. He was a pale boy with red hair and a large Roman nose.

"My father is right," said the son. "My mother arranged for a mistress for me."

I heard my voice say coldly, "We do not do such things in England."

I was astonished by my hypocrisy.

"Don't you believe it," the soldier said. "I was with the English during the war."

I couldn't bear the condescension in the son's long naked nose. His voice seemed to come down it. One of the young daughters overheard us, and said to her sister:

"*Il est féroce, cet Anglais.*"

But the city was evidently made for me. It was built for Art and Learning, whereas my London was built for government and trade. At home I was a tolerated joke, "the professor." One foggy morning when I'd been with my father in Cheapside, he had stopped to talk to a customer in the textile trade who asked what I was going to do.

My father said, "He says he wants to be a journalist."

The man replied, "Give him a copy of Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street*. That will cure him."

Because of this I have never read that famous novel.

In Paris, I thought, a conversation like that could not take place. Here one was driven into displaying a

talent. One would even be mocked for not doing so.

And how the streets and gardens of the city *helped*: the names were an encyclopedia of French history and classical instruction. In the parks the statues of heroes and goddesses, busts of painters, dramatists, and writers gesticulated among the nursemaids and the children and shared the place with the birds. In the next few days the old age that had rounded my shoulders in London—the James Barrie, Edmund Gosse stoop—slipped away from me.

The Christian Science lady lived near the Champ-de-Mars. She was a pleasant woman, busy and contented in the knowledge that she had had the final revelation about God and man, particularly on the practical side. I met her carrying a long roll of French bread under her arm into her house. A sort of virginity had been restored to her in the crisis of middle age. It turned out that she had once been married to a Frenchman, a problem which had been successfully prayed away to another address. She had lived in Paris most of her life. She took me out to lunch in Passy at a pretty and very private garden restaurant which, she said, was unusual among Paris restaurants. The owners were noted for their moral standards and cleanliness. We ate in the garden, and I was given a glass of Vichy water. This drew out the buried Calvinist.

"The war was the final manifestation of French decadence," she said.

("Manifestation" was a word often used by our sect. It was followed by another favorite: "Mesmerized.")

"They are mesmerized by sensuality. Their food is the cause of it—cooking in butter, the sauces, aperitifs, and above all, their strong coffee and wine. These stimulate their sensual appetites and make the French the most unspiritual race on the earth. They are far from God as we know him 'through Science.' "

I said I liked sitting in the cafés.

She corrected me: "French people of good family *never* go to cafés."

This lady was kind, but one soon came up against a blank wall in talking to her. The effect of these opinions was to make me want to eat more sauces and drink more wine. I kept quiet about this, but went with her to the Christian Science Meeting because there, she said, someone might know of a job, for my £20 was running out; to stay in France I would have to earn my living. She said the editor of a Paris newspaper was an admirer of the *Christian Science Monitor* and very "interested," as they said, "in Science." I was astounded. What influence our religion had. My doubts must be wrong!

Every small experience played on my wavering mind. The meeting of twenty-five people was held on Sunday morning in the room of a small dancing academy for young ladies in a genteel quarter. The waxed floor, the large black framed mirrors on the wall, the piano rather chipped, with its ill-tuned

notes, would send my mind wandering through the prayers and readings to the imaginary mademoiselle counting out the steps: "*Un, deux, trois, quatre—attention, Marie-France*" in some refined Edwardian tinkle. Even our First Reader, who read the Lord's Prayer in the primmest of good French, sounded rather as if he belonged to the eighties of the last century than to 1921; and indeed, young and American, he suggested, as many polite Americans did at that time, a society fixed in the past. The sensation of joining a previous age of gentility was a novelty to me who had been brought up in vulgar England, and in a family where manners were unknown, where everyone shouted, and no one had any notion of taste, either good or bad. We lived without it. And after the meeting, the amount of bowing and hat-raising that went on suggested a social life which I was entering just as, of course, it was maddeningly on the way out. Too late. Too late. I longed, for my first two or three weeks in Paris, to be in this sense a bourgeois if only to have something to give up.

In Paris the congregation were gayer and slacker than ours in Bromley, for they were a mixture of tourists glad to be out of England or America, business people or French and Italian Protestants, who said it was a liberation to get away from the Lutheran and other churches. They seemed to be the happiest people on earth: the Divine Mind fizzed like some harmless *vin mousseux* and stimulated the yes-yes-yes of the Americans. One or two of these had started or inherited small banks in the United States which were booming, and the Divine Mind had so arranged it that in Paris one got more and more francs for the dollar every month on the falling exchange—an exchange that fell because of the decadence and sexual indulgence of the French, their obsession with food and wine, their neglect of plumbing, and the disastrous fact of being Latins with the long, now happily decayed, influence of the Roman Catholic Church behind them. It amuses me to read nowadays that the twenties were a decade of wit and license. I had fallen not among sinners, but among the good.

Itold everyone I spoke to that I wanted to be a writer. Or a painter. I had brought a box of watercolors with me. Two men in the group took this very kindly. One was the Reader—whose French was so good—a well-off, handsome, and ascetic American of about thirty-five; his father was a small banker, who had lived in Paris before the war.

"I was an abstract painter." He smiled wearily at his folly.

"Can I see your pictures?"

"No, I've given it up."

Abstract painting was on the right lines, he said; it was more "mental," less of the flesh and the senses than the traditional thing. It alarmed me to hear he was one more of those intelligent men who had given

up literature and art for our religion. Shyly, tolerantly, he looked back on those mistaken Bohemian days. My resistance to the idea of becoming a purely spiritual being hardened. Still, he forgave me for hankering after the life he had, with evident struggle, put aside. He was a fanatic beneath his irony and gaiety. He had mortified the flesh. There was a rumor that he had attained the ideal and lived in a state of blessed virginity with his wife.

The other man was totally different: a gaudy and fleshy Americanized Londoner called Shaves. He sang louder than anyone else when the hymns started. I shall have more to say about this touching and ludicrous man who, when he laughed, looked like someone shouting in agony for help. He was in his forties. Once in the street after the meeting he could not hide his relief—he was made to go to church by his wife—and started to bawl out bits of opera while his wife and three young children tried to stop him. He was unquestionably common.

La, la, la, di, da, dah! Oh, my old coat
My old coat tried and trusted . . .

"Know it? *Bohème!* Cecil Chavasse, Metropolitan Opera, New York. My father. Ever hear him? What a voice!"

He scrutinized me. I'd never heard of his father. He gave me his look of vulgar appeal; then he committed a crime. Christian Scientists are told not to smoke or chew tobacco, for Mrs. Eddy belonged to the tobacco-chewing age in the United States. Mrs. Nathaniel Hawthorne had felt as she did about it. Mr. Shaves pushed a cigarette into a small holder, stuck it at an angle of 45 degrees in his mouth, and sailed off under his straw hat like a Cockney tripper at Southend. His wife put on the Christian Science smile of seeing and hearing no evil.

Nothing came of the Christian Scientists. After three weeks my money was nearly gone. I was desperate. I tried to get jobs on English newspapers. In a fatuous moment I went to *Le Figaro* and asked the girl at the desk, as best I could, if I could get a job as a reporter. I tried banks, tourist offices. I read with bewilderment French advertisements. Then one evening of panic I saw an advertisement in the Paris *Daily Mail*; a photographer wanted an assistant. I could hardly sleep that night. I brought the full force of Christian Science prayer to work. A success! At eight the next morning I rushed off to the place off the Boulevard des Italiens. It was a photographer's shop. The manager said: "I suppose your parents sent you over to study?" "No," I said. "I have to earn my living." I got the job.

I was a good young man, but the good have their dubious moments. I went to the nearest post office and sent a telegram to my father. I knew he would be pleased. But it was also a message of defiance. Letters had been coming from him every other day, advising me to make a daily list of my expenses, asking what I was doing about my laundry, and so on,



pointing out that I must, when in doubt, refer any detail to himself and the Divine Mind; and from then on there would be half a page on its operation, on the need to make the most of this experience until I came home, to see what would “unfold” for me in a few weeks. He had a very neat hand which ran one word into the next so that his letters were like one long sentence. I was not to regard these letters, he said, as lectures. A letter came back at once in answer to my telegram, asking me to say whether the photographers were a sound firm; was the salary paid by the week or month? The advice to put down my daily expenses was repeated. He always did this himself, and, I believe, this was one of the reasons for his chronic insolvency. The mere act charmed him into extravagance. These letters touched me, but my weeping days were over, and I was angry. I sent him a rude letter saying I did not want his advice every day, and that I was quite able to manage my own life. This must have hurt him and—so unreasonable is guilt—I felt guilty in standing up for my independence. But not for long.

I started work on a misty morning. The shop was in an arcade and was the Paris branch of an English manufacturer of photographic plates and papers. At first I had thought the boss was French, for he had the black long curly moustache and frisked-up hair of a French barber of the period and wore a tight little jacket and boots with high heels. In fact, he was a London sparrow brought up in Marseilles. His sallowness looked as though it had been painted with walnut stain, and he spoke French fast but with an entirely English pronunciation. His

“combiangs” and “ker voalay voos” raced through the tongue of Molière like a rusty lawn mower. He pointed out that on the small salary he was paying me I should have to leave my hotel and find a cheaper room.

That morning, I saw my job was a comedown after the leather trade. First of all, the situation of the shop was wrong. Du Maurier and Murger and W. J. Locke and Anatole France would have dropped me if they knew I was earning my living on the Right Bank within five minutes of Thomas Cook and the American Express: that I was in Paree and not Paris. My mind split: here I was copying, in pencil, lists of stock on half sheets of flimsy paper, hour after hour, in the dark back office of the shop, but my other self was across the river among the artists. The other people working in the shop were, first, the salesman: he was a heavy, black-haired, scowling young Highland Scot, a handsome man with gray threatening eyes and a very soft voice. He had run away from home at fifteen and, disguising his age, had fought in the artillery in the 1914 war. He was a broken-nosed army boxer, too. Toward the end of the war he had been blown off his horse and received a chunk of high explosive in his bottom and spoke of this with gravity. He had married a Frenchwoman, and I imagined a pert little midinette: but one day she stood in the arcade outside making signs to him, and I saw she was a plain, short woman, middle-aged and enormously fat. They lived in Montmartre, and he spoke of her cooking reverently. He was a magnet to all the women who came to the shop. They became helpless or frantic at the sight of him; he would stand close to them and look down into their eyes, unsmiling, and speak in a low voice, with slow, pedantic deliberation.

The rest of the staff were a nimble little guttersnipe from Montmartre called Pierre, and a gangling, hot-faced Breton. I was the clerk; they were messengers and packers. I checked the stock in a storeroom opposite the shop and packed as well. After a month, when suddenly my awkward French became fluent, I had to serve the customers and deal with the dozens of cash-on-delivery forms at the post office. By this time, if the boss had left, I had to type out short letters to the customers on an old English typewriter. I bought a book on French commercial correspondence. I was the hero of Pierre, the Montmartre boy, who jumped about as he watched me type with three fingers and helped me salt and pepper the letters with the proper French accents.

The customers were mainly from firms of photographers in Paris, but many came up from the provinces, bringing with them, to my mind, all that one thought of as the provincial bourgeois. Madame Bovarys came in to see the Scot. Their voices, and his, would drop to murmurs. Sometimes the two would disappear into the street together, and the Scot would be away for half an hour; the office boys, particularly the Breton, danced about him when he

came back trying to get details out of him. What was she like in bed? The male photographers had an artistic appearance which I admired. They wore hard-crowned black hats with wide brims and a loose black bow dangling from the collar. I longed to dress as they did, but the artistic dress was beyond my income.

For some time I was the office joke. The French boys could not pronounce my name. I became Monsieur Shwep or Machin-Shwep, occasionally M. Victor, and their clown. We all got on well. There is that picture of me sitting on the counter of the shop, wearing the tweed jacket and flannel trousers—a uniform unknown to the French in the twenties, for most Frenchmen wore black then—and my juvenile grin. I grinned most of the time, for I was careless of the future, living from day to day, free to do as I pleased. I became, finally, acceptable to the French boys when in the evenings we left the shop and all walked arm in arm along the Boulevard practicing the girl auction invented by the Breton.

“How much to sleep with this one? A thousand, five hundred, a hundred, twenty, ten?” they shouted as the girls came toward us.

One day I had a triumph.

“M. Shwep—how much?”

“Twenty-two francs fifty,” I said.

They were ravished by this superb office joke. Twenty-two francs fifty was the well-known price of one of the photographic papers we sold. How easily the office humorist is born.

But the Scot was the hero of the shop. It was he who was worshiped as we trailed after him to the bistro round the corner. His unsmiling face imposed. His drinking amazed. His betting at Auteuil and Longchamps was famous. We marched back to the shop after lunch, the Montmartre boy singing:

O, O, O, O, O!

Monsieur Mac boit pas d'eau.

The boss was frightened of the Scot, who towered over him. Mac's gestures were as slow as his speech. His arm came up as if judging for an uppercut when he talked to the boss, whose eyes began to flutter and feet to edge back. Sometimes, when one of the Madame Bovarys came into the shop and the magnetizing stares and monosyllabic invitations began, the boss would come out to stop them, but his courage always failed; and with ceremonious impudence Mac would say that in view of the importance of the lady as their best customer from Lille or Dijon, he thought he would go out for half an hour with her for a drink. One lunchtime when we were at the bistro and he was talking to the barman about some horse race or other, one of his women (who could not get a word in) became annoyed. She made a dart at his flies and pulled his cock out. The Scot turned slowly to her with admiration. He buttoned up and our procession marched back to the shop; Mac went straight to the boss, and in the sad manner of some old Scots preacher, he told the boss what had happened.

“I thought it might be advisable to warn you about the bistro,” he said, “in case you should find yourself in a similar situation.”

I left my room on the *cinquième* at the hotel. I now lived in a cheap room in Auteuil, a fashionable quarter, but my room was in the poorer part of it, where servants, shop assistants, and small employees lived. I had given up trying the Latin Quarter, for thousands of Americans had swarmed in and put up the prices. I had been forced to reject a tiny room in the Mont St. Geneviève because the place stank. In Auteuil I found a good cheap room on the ground floor in the flat of a war widow who went out to work every day as a charwoman. She was a sad woman in her thirties who came from Tours, and she was very religious, a strong Catholic, and very proud of the *pâtés* of her region. A priest used to bring her little boy back from school at the weekends: nuns visited her. The flat had two rooms. Mine was nearly filled by a large bed and a washstand and looked out on a yard and dirty wall.

When she was at home, Madame Chapin wore a black overall from chin to feet and felt slippers. She had a lamenting voice and sounded like one of the Fates. On Sunday mornings, usually when I was naked and washing in cold water, for there was no bathroom, she would come in with my laundry and stand there telling me bits of her life.

“Oh, that filthy war,” she would say again and again. “My husband would have been the chief mechanic at the garage if he had not been killed.”

Paris was a wicked city of heartless people, she would groan, as I tried to cover myself with the little wet towel. And there was a good deal of “Such is life” in my mother's fashion. Madame Chapin worked for a rich *cocotte* up the street.

“A life of luxury—but with women like that, a false step, a suspicion, and the man who keeps them throws them into the gutter.”

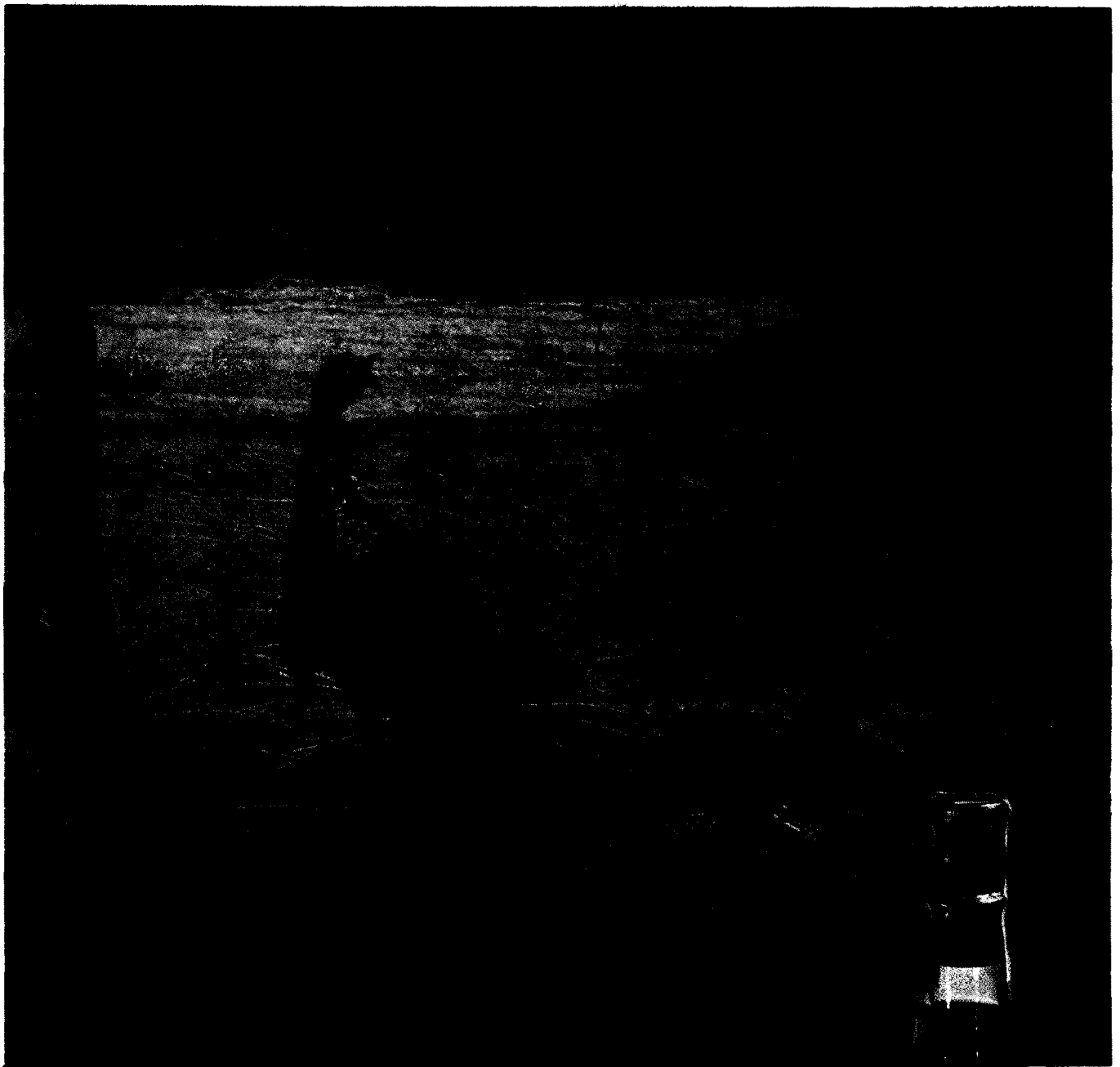
On Sundays she dressed in her best black, and now her face would seem rounder and her yellowish eyes would become warm and seductive. Her pale, dressed-up little boy would stare at me.

“Ah, my son,” she often said to him. “Look at the gentleman. He works. Work—follow his example, my son.”

And they would go off to Mass. I got to know Madame Chapin very well.

“I feel safe with you,” she said after a month. “It was not the same with my Polish lodger. I never felt any confidence with him, but with you it is different.”

I was hurt. One Sunday, when Christmas came, she came in dressed up in her black as usual with her boy. She was going on her annual visit to her sister, who had come to stay at the Ritz. This sister was a kept woman and lived with a motorcar manufacturer. The rich sister gave her discarded dresses to



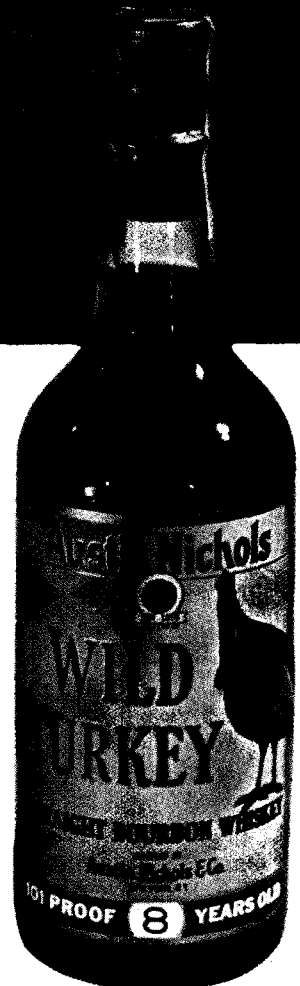
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sell, and the boy was given a book or a toy. When Madame Chapin came back, she fell back on her stock epitaph, standing still as stone in the doorway, in her mournful voice:

"With those women, one false step . . ." She seemed more like a man than a woman to me.

It did not occur to me until forty years later that this annual visit would make a good story. I moved the two sisters to London, and, in the manner of writers, changed or added to what I could guess of the characters. I gave Madame Chapin a husband. I think that what prevented me from writing the story before was my knowledge of her real life. It was not until I had given her an imaginary husband and transferred her to another place, that she took on the reality of fiction, and one, I think, that dignified her. It is part of the function of the novelist to speak for people, to make them say or reveal what they are unable to say, to give them a dignity, even the distinction of being comical, though she was not comical in my story. But in those Paris days I could not easily think of what to write about, and I did not know that the creative impulse is often ignited when scenes and people from the almost forgotten past are struck like a flint against something from the present.

At lunchtime I usually ate a crusty roll and butter, and by six o'clock, after the long wait in the queue at the post office with the parcels, I was torn between hunger and the whole of Paris. I walked down to the Tuileries, crossed the Pont des Arts into the Latin Quarter, and then began a torturing study of the grocers, the butchers, and the menus of restaurants. I was reading Rabelais by now, and his joy in the belly, his lists of sausages and *pâtés*, and his cries of "*À boire*" half fed me. The sight of snails, cheeses, garlic sausages, and the oily *filet d'hareng* worked on me until I had to give in. In the next two years I ate my way through the cheap streets of Paris. I sat alone, read, or watched people. I was no longer a shop assistant when I left at six o'clock. I became a gifted student, a writer, a painter "studying life." The noise of these restaurants made me happy. I had no friends, but the crowd seemed to be my friends. There was a stout, shouting fellow in a place in the rue de Seine whose voice was rich and greedy: he had a peg leg and when he came in, he used to unstrap it and hand it to the waitress, who stood it in the corner. Nowhere in London, I thought, would you see a sight like that. Afterwards I sat in cafés in the Boulevard St. Michel and watched the students at their game of squirting soda water at one another and joined in their singing:

*Ton honneur sera perdu
Comme les autres
Tu feras ma pauvre fille
Comme les autres font.*

One day a sewage cart passed, and the students rushed from the café, took off their hats, and with

bowed heads, walked in funeral procession behind it.

One evening I discovered that the artists met in the Rotonde and Dome at Montparnasse, and there I sat over a glass of coffee or beer for the rest of the evening, hoping that some of their genius would rub off on me. One night, there was a violent thunderstorm. I had switched from Rabelais to Plato. What with the lightning and the wine inside me, I was exalted. After these speechless evenings I would walk across that part of Paris, through Grenelle, to the room in Auteuil, and I would either go exhausted to bed or sit up trying to write, while my landlady groaned in her sleep in the room next door.

Most writers begin by imitation. I had the examples of Stevenson, Chesterton, Belloc, and—for his practical hints—the clever short sketches of Barrie. In French there were the essaylike writings of Anatole France. Naïvely I supposed that these writers were all learned men who had read enormously at the university and that until I had read pretty well as much, I would not be able or even entitled to write at all. I passed my Saturdays looking over the bookshops of the Boulevard St. Michel or the boxes of the *bouquinistes*. I saw that I had not only English literature but the whole of French literature standing between me and the act of writing. Books were cheap. I was used to going without a meal, if necessary, to buy them. I bought indiscriminately. I had got a history of French literature, then the Rabelais; Balzac, with his gluttonous appetite for the names of pieces of furniture, door knockers, lamps, the names of trades and products, pushed me to the dictionaries, but the *Contes Drolatiques* were cheerfully licentious; at any rate, in print, I would be a sexual adventurer. I read Lamartine, Vigny, and witty Beaumarchais: out of duty to my dead cousin Hilda I read Victor Hugo and the *Pléiade*; I mixed the sermons of Boileau with the titillations of *Manon Lescaut*; Chateaubriand was given up for the adulteries and seductions of Maupassant, or the ballads of Villon. What could I possibly get out of such chaotic reading? How far did my understanding reach? Not far at all, but I did seize the nature of these writers in some of their pages, for something stuck in the confusion of my mind as I sat reading by the light of Madame Chapin's oil lamp. The row of books along the high fly-blown mirror over the marble mantelpiece in my room got longer and longer, and the smell of the lamp was made aromatic by the smoke of Gauloises.

There was another reason for hesitating to write: a love of painting, the old hangover from Bartlett's days at Rosendale Road School, and *Modern Painters*. I spent afternoons in the galleries and stood unnerved by the pictures of the Post-Impressionists in the shops. The smell of paint itself excited my senses. I gazed with desire at the nudes. The attraction of painting was that a work could be instantly seen—no



turning of the page—and each brushstroke “told” to the eye. I lived by the eye: the miles I walked in Paris fed the appetite of the eye above all, so that I could imagine everything in the city was printed or painted on me. One warm Saturday I took my watercolors to St. Cloud and sat down to paint a group of trees. Other painters, stout men with beards, were painting Cezanne-like pictures of Prussian blue avenues. I squeezed and dabbed my paints and after a couple of hours got up to study the running muddle I had made. I was angry with my incompetence. I sneezed. The grass was damp, and within an hour I was down in a café trying to kill a heavy cold with hot rum and lemon. It lasted a dreadful fortnight in which I moved to Russia and read *Anna Karenina*. My career as a painter was over; but, all the more, pictures seemed to tell me how I ought to write.

The question was—what to write about? I found I simply wanted to write anything. I used to go and look at the Sorbonne: obviously I was not a man of learning. I gazed at Racine’s face: dramatic verse was beyond me. I had read that one writes because one has something to say. I could not see that I had anything to say except that I was alive. I simply wanted to write two or three sentences, even as banal as the advertisement on a sauce bottle, and see them in print with my name beneath them. I was at the bottom rung.

Suddenly I had a stroke of luck. I saw in the Paris-

New York *Herald* a note asking their readers to send in jokes. I realized I had been giggling for some weeks over one. After an hour or so of struggle I wrote it out. I had been standing outside the Opera with a young Englishman I had met, studying the playbills. He said: “Let’s go there tomorrow night.” I said: “We can’t. There’s nothing on.” He pointed to the notice. “Yes, there is,” he said, “They’re doing *Relâche*.” I sent this to the paper. The next day it was published with my full name and address underneath it. (I resented that they put in my address, exposing me as an amateur.) They did not pay me. This was my first published work. I kept it a long time. It taught me one thing. If one had nothing to say, one could at any rate write what other people said.

I was unable to progress from this point. I went back to the English writers I then admired: the Georgian poets, people like Stevenson, Chesterton, Belloc, Max Beerbohm. What was their common characteristic? It was obvious. They walked. Even Max Beerbohm had walked one morning. Walking started the engine inside them, and soon came the words: but they walked on the “open road,” not simply about city streets.

So, when the weekend was fine, I took to the road. Paris was small in 1921. It ended at the fortification where the Metro stopped. There were not a great many motorcars about, and I often walked out to St. Cloud, to St. Germain, and to Versailles, to Marly; and once, on a longer holiday, to Chartres, to see the blue glass and the withered kings. I came back white with dust and with a full notebook. I was being Stevenson without the donkey, or *The Beloved Vagabond*, with knapsack, garlic sausage to eat in a field by the roadside or at some cheap restaurant where, sweating and tired, I found my head spinning with the wine I drank. (*A boire!*) I think I was never happier. On longer journeys—to Pontoise and Chartres—I came back by train. Later on I found a young Englishman who came into the shop one day and talked about a writer called Lytton Strachey. He worked at the Bourse, and we went on a tramp in the real Bellocian tradition. We made a vow. We vowed we’d cross the Loire. We walked to Orléans and crossed the river. The country was dull, the *pavé* roads were straight and monotonous, the villages were not pretty: in the nights the bullfrogs barked in the pools of the plain; the wide riverbed of the Loire when we came to it was all stones, and the water had dwindled to little pools between them. We were twice pulled up by astounded gendarmes who thought we were tramps and asked us why we didn’t take a train. We said it was “*pour le sport*,” a phrase that was just coming in. “You are mad,” they said as they got back on their bikes, with that heavy swing of belts and leggings, and continued the interminable moralizing of the gendarmerie.

This young man was intelligent. He, too, felt liberated by being in Paris and hated that he had to go back into the family stockbroking business in London. He was a more sensible reader than I: he in-

roduced me to the works of the new writers: Keynes, Roger Fry, and Clive Bell. I envied him because he had been to an English Public School; he envied me for wanting to be a writer. I said if I could not manage to be a writer, I would still not return to England. He said I was right. He added he had an uncle who owned a mine in Morocco and that the uncle might give me a job as a labor manager there. On and off, after that, I would see myself dressed in breeches, gaiters, and open-necked shirt by the lift of some rattling mine. I was always weather-beaten in these pictures. This dream became so real to us that he wrote to his uncle, who wrote back and said, alas, he had sold his mine. Another fantasy of ours arose because he had acted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at school: we called ourselves Pyramus and Thisbe, a joke that seemed side-splitting to us. When he laughed, his wide mouth curved up almost from ear to ear and his eyes closed into long curving slits. He was very shocked by the screaming greedy frenzy of the brokers at the Bourse, a noise that could be heard streets away, even in the Boulevard des Italiens. After we had been friends for some time, an American at the Christian Science Meeting said:

"I suppose you know he is Jewish? I thought I ought to warn you."

This was my first meeting with anti-Semitism. I did not know he was Jewish; but it made me reflect that, especially in my school life, the only boys who took my desire to write seriously were Jewish.

But what was I to write about? My collected works were on the little bamboo table at Madame Chapin's. There was my major work, done three or four years back: three pages on the Reformation and Renaissance meeting in the works of Milton. There was half a page describing the clock in our dining room at home. There were two more half pages on my brother's hairy friend, and another two on a man in the leather trade who was always quoting Shakespeare as we turned over the sheepskins on the warehouse table. And there was my latest work: the joke. I must hurry. I had read in Barrie's *When a Man's Single* that the thing to do was to write on the smallest things and those near to you. There is a straw caught on the window ledge. Will it fall or will it stay? There was an essay, he said, in things like that. What was nearest to me? My room, Madame Chapin groaning next door. Nothing there. And then, by a trick of memory, my mind went back to my first room in Paris. There was a barracks near my new room, and at night I would hear the bugle, as I used to hear the bugle at the Champ-de-Mars. The beautiful word *cinquième* sounded at once in my head. My nights there came back to me. I set about evoking the rough blue cloth on the table, the attic window, the carpet worn by so many predecessors till it was as thin as a slice of ham, the bugle call, even the notices on the door: "No strangers in the room after eleven," and "After eleven a supplement for electricity will be charged"—and how the light flicked

off at that hour. I began to write. Madame Chapin's groans supplied a tenant for the room next door at my old hotel. I wrote for two hours. On other nights I rewrote several times. I added some sentimental moralizings.

At the photographers I stayed late and typed the thing. I sent it to a London paper, and not to lose time I finished two more and sent them. They went to two weekly reviews—the *Saturday Westminster*, *Time and Tide*—and to the *Christian Science Monitor*. There were weeks of iron silence. Then, within a month or two of one another, the three papers accepted them. There! It was easy to be a writer. Outwardly cool and with a curious sense of being naked and exposed, I hummed inside with the giddiness of my genius.

I cannot describe my shamefaced pride. There was no more "I want to be a writer." I was a writer. Editors thought so, I told the boys and the Scot at the shop. The Scot had his nation's regard for the written word. The wet-mouthed Breton gaped and punched me in the back. Pierre astonished me. He was always picking up Montmartre songs, and about this time his favorites were one about the rising price of Camembert, and a topical one about Deschanel, the Prime Minister who had fallen out of the train on his way to the lavatory, a song with a chorus of *innuendo*:

*Il n'a pas abîmé ses pyjamas
c'était épatant, mais c'était comme ça.*

He stopped and put on a small act:

"M. Shwep, the great Balzac," he sang and danced around me. He had picked up the name from the street. At his age boys know everything.

I told Madame Chapin. She congratulated me, but hers was a face of little expression. Mournfully, after reflection, she said the man who kept the woman for whom she worked was a journalist. I could not tell her how her groans had helped me to write, and I felt, when I saw her, how strange it was when she stood, bringing in my shirts, that part of her led a ghost life in what I had written. She asked to borrow the first article. She wanted to show it to the priest who came on Saturdays with her boy.

A week later the priest returned it.

"Ah," he moralized. "At that time you were on the *cinquième*. Now you are on the ground floor."

There was, to judge by the amusement in his eyes, another meaning to this sentence; like every Frenchman he loved a nuance. I read and reread this article again and again, and then, as happens to writers, I was impatient with it and disliked it. I had my first experience of the depression and sense of nothingness that comes when a piece of work is done. The satisfaction is in the act itself; when it is over there is relief, but the satisfaction is gone. After fifty years I still find this to be so, and with every new piece of writing I have to make that terrifying break with my real life and learn to write again, from the beginning. □

THE FAINT-HEARTED SUICIDE

by Maxine Kumin

Where the arm
narrows down to its human part
where the skin
lilts over its rivers
smooth as old beach glass
and ten underground thongs
tie the palm in place
tie the base
of the leg-o'-mutton thumb
that squat wise man
in position

there at that gentle confluence
two worms
not exactly twins
sleep in their white welts
sleep ragged but uncurled
under the scars
where x marks the spot.

I finger it left to right.
I have it by heart
that white night:
the bathroom bulb a hot eye
the square white tiles
heaving against you
the shower rail dripping teeth
life at your temples
setting the time bomb
while the helpless towels
huddle in a corner
and the brand-new Wilkinson blade
winks out of the razor.

I think of the sweet streets
of your childhood—
Upsal, Tulpehocken, Queen's Lane—
an alphabet of old place names
tucked into your bicycle.
I think of those summer nights
spread wide as a platter
with the trumpet vines drowsing
their way up the verandah
and the porch swing a scratchy flute
answering the cicadas.

There was a bed made for you
there was a durable kitchen
where almonds and apricots
knocked in the cupboards
there were waxed newel posts
footsteps that listened and loved you

and then
you had no way to
get back inside the geography.
No telegraph to tap out on
no one to cry uncle to.
The rented walls of Manhattan
locked arms to fence you
into Red Rover.

Two clean cuts
and the invited blood comes naked
comes slippery and abundant
red as the red lips
of your first whore.
A letting useful as leeches
bringing you back to your body
that boyhood
that kingdom.

LIFE & LETTERS

ON EPIDEMIC FIRST PERSONISM

by Herbert Gold

When it first occurred to me that perhaps the current fad for first person parajournalism, where the reporter—me, say—looks into his own heart for information about politics, war, or suffering, and tells what he finds there in long loping sentences all stuffed with literary allusion and neighborhood bar slang—I'm a scholar and good fellow, too—may have gone too far, I decided to spend a few days away from my wife and five lovely children in order to explore my angst-ridden contemporary soul for one of the deepest and truest articles I have ever written. Syntax, structure, and information would be no obstacle to my quest for self-analysis. Outré! Right on! I must seek to discover whether delicious solipsism, the deepest religion of my kind, can ever supplant horrid egotism, the disease of others. But first, let me tell you about my childhood in Cleveland . . .

About a hundred years ago Dostoevsky assaulted his fellow novelist Turgenev with this accusation: When T. describes a shipwreck, with children drowning, what he describes is the tears running down his own cheeks. See! Turgenev is sad. See! Turgenev is moved. See sensitive Turgenev.

It wasn't entirely just. And yet, if it was unfair to Turgenev, it remains true to a recurrent weakness among writers. The lust to make an evocation which comes alive for readers, providing an almost religious communion of souls, sometimes degenerates into mere me-me-me-singing. In the fantastic hearts of writers there is

always the temptation to justify, to brag and confess, to make their own immortal souls the prime issue for everyone else. And now, as writers become celebrities, they are being rewarded for this childish frailty. Confessional operetta, the one-man show starring a howling, complaining, bragging, spangled, bangled, and adjective-crazed prose ingenue, is the literary fashion of the time. First personism has become an epidemic contagion.

The reporter headed for trouble spots doesn't wear his William Holden trench coat anymore, but knows what is expected of him: "How I Got Drunk in the Middle East."

The crusading lady writer, spellbound by deep questions of essence and being, begins with a theme and a title: "Thoughts on the Role of Women in Our Society While I Squeeze My Hated Husband's Blackheads."

The English philosopher C. E. M. Joad defined decadence as "dropping the object." That is, an overelaborate architecture tells us that the object for which the building was built is forgotten. The decadent construction stands pretending to be one thing—a church, a bank, a restaurant—but is, in fact, a monument to euphemism, cleverness, or historical nostalgia. In the same way, an involuted, self-displaying rhetoric is careless of argument. It may use the vocabulary and gesture of original thinking, and evoke the standards of the past (or of the future), and hurtle with an energy of conviction, but the real purpose is not

to discover but to display. We might ask of some contemporary styles: Is the speediness a haste to learn the truth, or is it merely another speedy ego trip? Are all the good stunts necessary to outwit stubborn ignorance and habit, or are they intended merely to show us the author's latest postures?

The first-person arias of the Wolfettes and Mailerlings center the whole world in the self of the writer. They don't do their job of telling and sharing experience. Instead, they sacrifice knowledge for a parading of personality—the wistfully arrogant group personality of the quintessential *New Yorker* writer, the bluff Southern heartiness of the traveler for the recent *Harper's*, the anxious deprecation of *New York* magazine's new conservative chicness, the bleary sexual confession of the *Village Voice*, the run-on truth-speed-paranoia mumble of many of the underground journalists, the rollicking buffoonery of *Rolling Stone's* and *Esquire's* fine young chaps. Many of these writers are talented, and I name few names because, to paraphrase Vladimir Nabokov, anonymous dispraise hurts a little less. I've taken a turn or two myself in the past.

Perhaps these writers should be writing fiction. To make oneself larger is an impulse legitimately gratified through the magnifying vision of the fictive imagination. But it's a spoiled self-display to take a matter of life and death for others—rats in slums, poison in food, war, and miseries—and use it to show the tears on your own cheeks. Many articles now

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August Report on
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We who write these ads are always glad when a new book by **Robert Coles** comes along, for we never have to grope for something to say. In the last six months he has been nominated for a National Book Award, has become the first two-time winner of the Family Life Award of the Child Study Association, and will no doubt have received other honors before this goes to press.

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by Robert Coles

182 Pages 164 Photographs
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LITTLE, BROWN

tell us all about the problem of the writer's jet reservations, the Holiday Inn in which he stays, his loneliness at night, his menu and his wine card—all material better described in his expense account—and only then get to the entertainer or revivalist or politician he is interviewing. The delight in self, the lack of delight in subject matter, implies a serious ultimate judgment which ought to be faced by the first-person journalist: What matters? Does the world matter? Does anything matter but me? Is there anything out there? Is my business to stroke myself, and let the voyeuristic reader watch while telling him he is learning something, practicing sympathy or intelligence? Beyond the game of prose, is there something which is not a game?

Back in the mid-fifties the critic Norman Podhoretz wrote a magazine article in which he predicted that the new American art form would be . . . magazine articles. People want to know, he said, and fiction is tuckered out. The novelists will be too impatient to suffer the long incubation of fiction. They want the immediate joy of publication now, renown now, and the gratifying contact with the great and the ignoble which touring journalists can have.

Well, Podhoretz's prediction turned out to be prophetic. Magazine readers and editors wearied of the objective homogeneity of traditional cottonspeak article prose, and also of the breathless backward-reels-the-mind pseudo-excitement of traditional anonymous jazziness. The individual voices of talented writers provided a fresh perspective on the real world: Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, James Baldwin, Gore Vidal, Paul Goodman, Joan Didion. First they were writers, then they were celebrities, and then the prose is in danger. The prose is in danger right away with their epigone.

Not that anyone wants to return to the term paper as the model for objective seriousness, or Pete Martin visiting the stars as a model for intimacy. The women's lib journalists—Sally Kempton and Vivian Gornick, for example—sometimes build to touching climaxes of misery as they equate the troubles of the world with their own dramatic troubles with men. With some subjects—rock music, say, or the Film Star Interview, a form which has become almost as

classic and familiar as the sonnet—it's proper that the article be an exploration into the deepest heart of America or Hollywood by a talented, lonely, and scared pop-writer. Surely it's not important to treat Grand Funk Railroad or Raquel Welch as more than an occasion for a lonely meditation on Me and the Media, Me and Your Friendly Neighborhood Sex Goddess.

But enough already. There really is a real world out there. "As I was saying to my wife only last night as I strove to write this piece" is probably a phrase that leaps unforgettably to the scissors in the final version. The writer sets himself up as judge and jury, and the reader is entitled to know what his standards are, but he might just as well leave out the personal advertisements. Jack Newfield's running romance with the Kennedys let us in on every twist and turn of his aching heart, but what we really wanted to know about each of the Kennedy brothers was what they meant to the rest of us, not how Jack Newfield's nose was continually clogged with difficult feelings. A little objectivity is not a dangerous thing. We need to hear the subject more than we need to hear the heroic writer's conversations with his intimates. Tacitus, Tolstoy, Coleridge—to take three raconteurs at random—discussed the real world and also used the word "I." But they discussed the real world of history, morality, or art. The "I" was located firmly. First-person journalism is not a new phenomenon. It's only the celebrity-mongering, the offering of the self for sale by flashy wordsmithing selfs, that seems very modern. (Hemingway's decline was the last generation's sad example.) The trouble comes when there's not enough world and too much self.

It used to be thought that popular magazines flattered their readers by giving them pabulum. Now, in a time avid for stimulation and personality, there's pepper in the pabulum. It used to be that journalists buried themselves like cynical monks, telling who-what-where-when-how, and leaving out the why. Now, trying to give the meaning of it all, the playful para-journalists lie down like puppies, howling operatically, their four paws in the air, scratching their own bellies. For many years Norman Mailer tried to avoid the use of the word "I"

by referring to himself as "One," as in the (sample) phrase, *One predicts the apocalypse as one suffers cancer-producing Muzak*. Now, in his moonshot, he has taken to the astrological plural, calling himself "Aquarius." In either case, the "I" is central to the thought, and the Mailerlings get a confused message. What is good in Mailer is the participation in a real world. What the epigone reads is that he sure gets away with talking about himself a lot.

At its best, the first person singular can reflect the context of events, give a passionate depth sounding, resonate with social need, answer for a moment the avidity for touch and intimacy which is one of the diseases of mass society, and thus truly justify what *this writer* says, feels, suffers. And sometimes, for example, Norman Mailer (on the police at the Pentagon), Tom Wolfe (on the East Side girl with everything), Gloria Steinem (interviewing Pat Nixon for *New York* magazine), George P. Elliott (on pornography in *Harper's*), Tom Williams in *Esquire* (on the touching and dreadful innocence of hard hats), Wilfrid Sheed in almost any of his film and book reviews make the interaction of touring self and throbbing subject an occasion for both light and heat.

The personal reportage of Joan Didion brilliantly evokes the starved privacy of Americans, no matter what her ostensible subject. Have Medium, Will Travel. Writers often surprise themselves with what they celebrate—homosexuality, the Manson case, women's lib, Bobby Seale, or the opening of a tennis ranch—and as they meet each other, crisscrossing the country on the magic wings of the expense account, they must sometimes fret about what they will either discover or sweep noisily under the rug, depending on their talent and sense of responsibility.

Stendhal said that the ideal style would be that of the Napoleonic code, direct, unambiguous, impersonal, cool. Well, writers aren't laying down the law; they don't have Napoleon's authority; and therefore, if they hope to make a strong case, they need to arouse passion by giving a strong whiff of personality, of soul, as Stendhal himself understood in his novels. But the ideal of a crystalline transparency and objectivity is one which needs to be recalled in a time of self-important muttering, grouching,

and self-display. The mystery of personality is a proper fuel in making art; it may be the essential one. But the magazine article is not a TV talk-show interview of the self by the self, in which a writer emits sounds about his own greening with the illusion that he in his own body and soul makes up most of what is significant about America (or Amerika). That's dropping the object. That's confusing one's own wet cheeks with the heaving seas, the perplexed children, and the shipwreck.

"Say, fella," said Enrico Banducci, proprietor of Enrico's Coffee House

where all us high-living first-person journalists hang out in San Francisco, "say, Herb, how'd you do on that article criticizing first-person journalism?"

"I think I did good this time, Reek," I said (all us intimate first-person journalists like to call him Reek). "I think I really hit the ole ball this time, Bandooch," I said (all us first-person journalists like to rotate our vocabularies when we're referring to our contact with stories out there in real life).

"That's just dandy," answered my colorful bar-owning pal. "Then can I tell Susie you'll pay up your tab?"

"THE END OF THE WORLD IS COMING"

by Elizabeth Janeway

The myth of the Apocalypse has always figured as a sort of escape hatch in the imagination of Western man. Today its influence appears to be increasingly great. In psychological terms it is an expression of human rage and longing incorporating the urgent desire of the lowly to see the mighty put down from their high seats in revenge for the everyday pain, discouragement, and frustration suffered by the lowly. The myth gives the unsatisfied a chance to imagine a different structure of society, a different system of awards, a different causality. It is both terrifying and hopeful. The world will end in fire or flood, but the ending will not be final. It will herald the rebirth of a new and more just society in which wounds will be healed, wrongs redressed, and the State will have withered away. Often old gods return, or the Messiah speaks in their symbols, for, psychologically, the myth is linked to the past. It is the remembered dream of an early golden age projected into the future.

An enduring mythology tends to keep, within its body of beliefs, some opening toward apocalyptic drama. The Church—any church—is a historical structure which must act according to the laws of society and ordinary causality; but it owes its origin to dreams and promises whose fulfillment falls outside the law. In times of trouble, these promises are remembered by a growing number of the

unsatisfied. When the Church fails to respond—and if the demands are great enough, it will certainly fail—another order will be posited; for though the breakdown of any particular system can be accepted intellectually, it's impossible to accept the idea that *no* order can succeed without falling into despair. New sects appear then, new prophets rise; mystery religions, cargo cults, Anabaptists, Ghost Dancers, snake handlers, and encounter groups offer new explanations for disaster, new remedies and directives for action, new maps of the universe.

Our current religion—reason, science and technology—has had remarkable success in remaking the external world. It has come close to fulfilling promises of material comfort for all instead of luxury for a tiny élite which, two hundred years ago, must have seemed mythically unreal. But our progress toward this goal has shown that, like any single vision, such an aim leaves too much out; in this case, the emotional satisfaction of the congregation of the Church of Reason. Result: the upspringing of alternative patterns of belief whose nuttiness survives reasoned argument because reason itself has come to seem irreparably nutty. Now even the old bourgeois art form, the novel, has begun to seek alternative ground. It is swinging away from its original task of explaining the customs and identifying the denizens of the emergent

middle class and is turning against the established culture which produced it, both through technical experiment and by choosing its material, more and more, from outside conventional actuality.

Utopian fictions have, of course, been written for generations. Anti-Utopian novels are more specifically a product of our time, though the two which defined the genre are not very new: *Brave New World* came out in 1932 and 1984 in 1949. Yeats had sensed the approach of The Second Coming even earlier, but then poets are normally farther-sighted than novelists. The message of the anti-Utopian novelists is not simply a re-writing of the apocalyptic vision, but a reversal of it. "We shall overcome," that vision promises. The fire next time, but after the fire, the Kingdom of Heaven, the New Jerusalem. Faithful and True, on the white horse, will conquer the beast and his false prophet and cast them alive into the lake of fire, just as St. John the Divine foretold. And then—

And then, say the anti-Utopians, things will get worse. The new Apocalypse leads on to hell, not to heaven. The reason is simple: the Messiah loses. Or if he wins, he is not the Messiah at all, but a false prophet. The promise of a new order is a lie, for any order implies the use of power, and power corrupts. This misquotation of Acton, declaring the inevitability of corruption, is typical of mythic thinking, which always runs to absolutes. And so the anti-Utopians, unable to conceive a hero whom they can trust, are left with no choice but anarchy or tyranny, and in this despair the vision freezes.

Three recent novels illustrate some of the characteristics of anti-Utopian fiction. All have strengths, but certainly the best novel is Walker Percy's *Love in the Ruins* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), largely because it breaks many of the new rules and holds to some of the old. Percy, for one thing, provides a semi-hero, Dr. Thomas More, and his villains are only semi-evil. The time is 1983. The center has ceased to hold, and the end of the world is expected; but it is a quirky and human world still, most resembling (one imagines) the patchy sixteenth-century Europe of the two Gregorys, the great Pope and the bishop of Tours, when the Empire had fallen apart and Justinian's effort at restitu-

tion had failed in the West, when the Goths were still restless, but churches were built, art created, and history written.

Percy's semi-hero is an unlikely Messiah, but he has a method and a mission: to save the world by means of a machine that can read the mind. More's lapsometer is a sophisticated long-range variant of an electroencephalograph which (in a fictional elision) can not only record brain waves but trace their connection to emotions. More, a collateral descendant of the saint, is tempted by power and falls. A Babbitt Mephistopheles offers to turn his lapsometer from a recording instrument into one which will cure the maladies it measures. In classic style, the need to cure is the tragic flaw of hubris which ensures the hero's downfall. Once the small-time devil, Art Immelmann, has got his hands on More's machine and the hero's consent to turn it from passive observer to active healer, he misuses it in fine, frenzied style, raises the level of rage in the locality to riot, and sets off a slow but sizzling nuclear reaction by activating the heavy sodium in the soil. The world ends, more or less, in More's bit of Louisiana at 7 P.M. on July 4, 1983; but not very thoroughly, for an epilogue bears the title *Five Years Later* and provides a happy ending for the semi-hero once the chance of using power has passed out of his hands. He is saved by losing and, no more a Messiah, is returned to the human condition.

Unlike most anti-Utopias, this is a charming and funny book. Present blurs into future, the familiar into revolutionary but plausible change. Percy's fantasy is disciplined, and when he deals in horror, he eschews it entirely. The horror in More's life is convincing because it is familiar. The death of his daughter and only child and his knowledge of and guilt for his own inadequate reaction to it is a story as old as humanity. Around the terror of death, life steams in a comic stew. More's wife leaves him to find spiritual fulfillment with an English Buddhist homosexual pair, all of them mouthing pious banalities. More quickly acquires three girlfriends, with a fourth offered, each projecting a different wacky variety of allure. He is plagued by boredom, despair, hives, and a touch of alcoholism and saved in the end by ancient

values: hard work, monogamy, sobriety, humility. Seldom have these moral imperatives been made so attractive.

Marge Piercy's *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* (Doubleday) is another tale of the near future in which some unsettling possibilities have come true. The Establishment has carried through a secret revolution or, if you prefer, has completed and enforced the one which the counterculture suspects is in process. The young are brainwashed by a school system which manipulates its victims into accepting the goals, methods, and pleasures prescribed by the power structure. The draft has been renamed the Nineteenth Year of Service and amalgamated with Vista and the Peace Corps, successfully regimenting idealism into support of the status quo. The status quo is totally hateful, and the action of the novel consists of a revolt against it by the young. One sympathizes, but belief comes harder.

Like Percy, Piercy believes that power corrupts, but she is more interested in the details of the process. Her story is a study in the failure of the revolt as its half dozen young leaders succumb to greed, selfishness, pride, and distrust and go down before the Fascist Pigs. This is a not unsuccessful novel of a kind which those who recall the proletarian literature of the thirties will recognize at once. The conflicts are clearly imagined, and, stereotyped though the characters are, they are efficiently managed. One is reminded of those movies in which everyone in the cast illustrates some identifiable group or trait. So we have the rock singer, the Indian who finds his identity in the remembrance of his heritage, the young scientist (an up-to-date Tom Swift and his Electric Flying-boat), the black leader of an outcast group, and two girls who must find their identities as women as well as rebels. Next year we might have a delegate from the Gay Liberation Front.

It works as well as socialist realism can. What is missing is the astonishment of life, the shock of experience. Miss Piercy has a perfectly sound idea, but ideas don't make novels, they make tracts. This author is herself still in fee to the Age of Reason, and so she labors her points, and the society she posits is too simple, too "constructed" in its hatefulness. Dear heaven! If the Establishment were ef-

fective enough to do all the things she credits it with, we wouldn't be in all this trouble. From *Brave New World* on, the nightmare of the anti-Utopian novel has been enforced conformity, a successful rule over the minds of all citizens. But in fact, what our Establishment is afflicted with is inability to rule the minds of its citizens, inefficiency in achieving its aims, confusion, flubdubbery, galloping anomie, and credibility gaps of all sizes. The efficiency of the Establishment is a myth of the counter-culture, a projection onto "Them," the enemy, of dangerous power. In its way it is just as misleading and overblown as the peril John Mitchell purports to see in the Berrigans. Each overestimate is an instrument—no doubt unconscious—which serves to bind one side together by exaggerating the power of the opponent.

Doris Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell* (Knopf) takes another tack. Its scene is the interior world, not the future. Its hero is nameless for most of the book, a soul on a journey. The bereft body, left behind, is picked up and deposited in a London hospital. The story proceeds then on two levels, what is happening to the body, argued over by two doctors with different theories of therapy, and what is happening to the soul; or, rather, the metaphoric narrative in which the soul clothes its experience.

The body is that of Charles Watkins, professor of classics at Cambridge. The soul is that of a potential Messiah. To the doctors, Watkins is the victim of a disabling schizophrenic episode. They want to cure him and return him to his quite successful position in society. To himself, Watkins is a lost and yearning traveler desperately trying to make contact with the source of spiritual power; and after a lengthy journey and various symbolic ordeals and trials, he does. It is revealed to him that he is one of a missionary group sent by the Almighty to redeem the world. His schizophrenia is a retreat into a deeper reality, a way of superior knowledge and reintegration. Before it is completed, however, the doctors subject him to electric shock. This "cures" him by wiping out the wisdom he has gained (or remembered) and returns him to his old unhappy ordinary self. Once more, the hero loses and the cure offered by science is declared to be the death of the soul.

I can't say that Miss Lessing has written a truly successful novel, though her people are certainly more various and interesting than Miss Piercy's. Once again, the idea behind the book rules with a heavy hand. But though it has not been completely absorbed into the story, it is a profoundly interesting idea and not a simplistic one. Whether Miss Lessing came to it by way of R. D. Laing I don't know, but Laing has put it forward, most explicitly in *The Politics of Experience*. In this he suggests that schizophrenia might well be interpreted in terms of an extremely ancient belief, "the shaman's journey." Shamans were priests, magicians, and healers to hunting tribes in Europe, Asia, and North America, surviving till yesterday in Siberia and among the Eskimo. The dancing sorcerer, painted on the wall of the Old Stone Age cave of Trois Frères, was almost certainly a masked shaman, and so, probably, were the other animal-headed male figures of Paleolithic art. The shaman's journey is a retreat into his own psyche which is experienced as a trip to a far country, often to the sky, often involving meetings with ce-

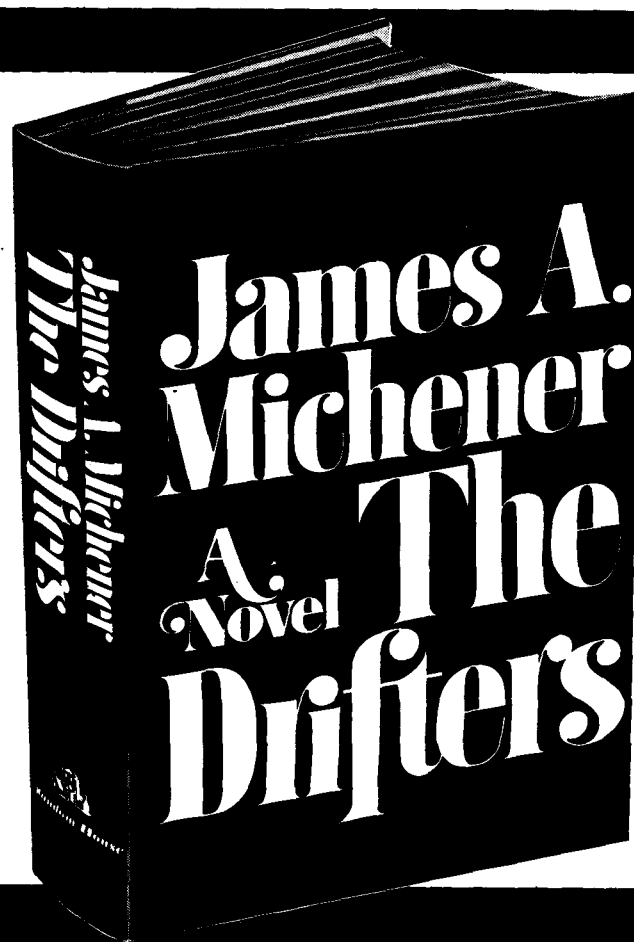
lestial beings. Psychologically (I assume), this permits the melting of old rigid patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior, and the creation of new, more satisfying and insightful approaches to life. It is also an experience of ecstasy and revivification. The shaman used his new knowledge not only for himself but as a healer. "What is fundamental and universal," writes Mircea Eliade in his well-known study of the phenomenon, *Shamanism*, "is the shaman's struggle against what we would call 'the powers of evil.' [This offers] the assurance that human beings are not alone in a foreign world, surrounded by demons. . . . The shaman's essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community depends above all on this: men are sure that *one of them* is able to help them." In *The Politics of Experience*, Laing cites a case history of a recovered schizophrenic who told of his own retreat and return. Oddly enough, during the episode he was able to cure a cut he had suffered and to control other, unruly patients. Oddly enough, his name was Watkins.

Well, this or something like it is the

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material Miss Lessing has used. Charles Watkins' strange journey, the friendly animals, evil rat-dogs, benighted humans, and celestial beings he encounters, his own occasional invisibility, reproduces details of the shaman's trip to the interior. If this book doesn't quite come off, it is poetry that is lacking. Miss Lessing is a good, solid novelist, not a poet. I respect her insistence on keeping her fantasy the recognizable product of Watkins' mind: too many self-indulgent novels offer symbols so private to the author that they don't touch the reader at all. I also respect greatly her willingness to try new forms and new material. This book is interesting, readable, often amusing, but it hasn't quite jelled.

Fiction must certainly reach outside its old limits or die of inanition. But it has its discipline as an art and imposes its own imperatives. One of these is that the reader should be able to project himself into the emotional experience of the *dramatis personae*. Overdefinition of characters who are simply ideas-in-action makes this difficult. Certainly, characters in fiction (even in realistic fiction) are symbolic, standing for more than themselves. But truly powerful symbols can never be totally defined. They preserve a mysterious connection with the context of life from which they grow. Good fiction is an exploration of a human situation. In great fiction the exploration can never be completed. There is always something remaining to be felt and discovered about the matrix of life through the patterns expressed in true art. In fiction, it is the muddy and surprising emotions of human beings which make up the pattern. Walker Percy holds on to the emotions and trusts them, correctly, more than the idea of the Apocalypse, which he reduces to comic size in order to match it to his people. Marge Piercy stamps out her characters to match her thesis. Doris Lessing's hero, her one real character, is psychologically dismembered (such dismemberment is often part of the shaman's dream) and so beyond our interpretation.

The theme of the Apocalypse is increasingly attractive and pervasive in our literature. No doubt we will one day read novels which are at once as serious as Lessing's and as emotionally sound as Percy's. Till then our understanding of the significance

of the myth had best be sought through nonfiction: read *The Ghost Dance* by Weston La Barre and *At the Edge of History* by William Irwin Thompson. Or through the poets:

read *Crow* by Ted Hughes, a natural bird-shaman. Or through the one great novelist of the Apocalypse the Western world has produced, Feodor Dostoevsky.

LAST PRISONER AT SPANDAU

by Gordon A. Craig

MOTIVE FOR A MISSION
by James Douglas-Hamilton
St. Martin's Press, \$8.95

HESS: THE MAN AND HIS MISSION
by J. Bernard Hutton
Macmillan, \$6.95

One of the great sensations of the Second World War was that caused by the news in May, 1941, that Rudolf Hess, the Deputy Fuehrer of the German Reich, had flown to Britain. The purpose of the flight and the question whether it was authorized by Hitler or invited by the British were the subjects of intense debate in Washington and Moscow and Rome, and neither Hitler's announcement that his associate had gone mad nor Churchill's intimation to the Americans and the Russians that Hess's visit was unexpected and unwelcome succeeded in clarifying the matter to everyone's satisfaction. Nor did Hess's formal statement at Nuremberg, which touched only briefly on his mission and said nothing of the antecedent circumstances. With little evidence to go on, historians have simply had to speculate about what prompted Hess's action or to pass over the incident in silence.

They will now be spared that awkward choice, thanks to the hard work of James Douglas-Hamilton, the second son of that Duke of Hamilton to whom Hess asked to be taken when he parachuted into Scotland. The young historian has, in a sense, lived with the Hess mystery all his life, and when he went down from Oxford, he decided to do what he could to untangle it, not only by reconstructing the British part of the story but by investigating the German background as well. The result of his efforts is a fascinating book and a surprising one, for it turns out that Hess, without Hitler's knowledge, was making his own attempt at personal

diplomacy. Having fallen in rank in Der Fuehrer's hierarchy, he hoped to regain his ascendancy by effecting a peace between England and Germany, thereby facilitating the invasion of Russia which he knew was well into the organizational stage. The main figure in the story, however, and the key to many of the problems that have troubled historians, is not Hess but a rather more obscure person, Albrecht Haushofer.

In 1919, Rudolf Hess was demobilized in Munich after four years of war. Like many other *Frontkämpfer*, he was restless and disoriented, in Douglas-Hamilton's words, "a fanatical young man in search of a father-substitute and a cause." The latter he found in National Socialism, and in the turbulent days that followed the fall of the Soviet regime in Munich, he became one of Hitler's first and most ardent followers. At the same time, he enrolled as a student of economics in the University of Munich, and it was here that he found a paternal counselor in the person of Karl Haushofer, a former major general in the imperial army who had begun in 1919 to give lectures on a new science that he called geopolitics. This was a kind of political geography seen from the German point of view, which, at least by implication, sought to explain the directions that German policy must take in order to repair the losses of the recent war. It fascinated Hess and inspired him with reverence for the man who professed it, a feeling that deepened in the days that followed the collapse of Hitler's attempted *coup d'état* in November, 1923, when, as a fugitive from the police, Hess was given shelter in Haushofer's home in the Bavarian Alps and then was helped by him to slip across the Austrian border.

Hess never forgot these things. During the next ten years, he remained on terms of intimacy with the

Haushofer family, particularly with the professor's elder son, Albrecht, who was only nine years younger than Hess; and when Hitler came to power in 1933 and Hess was in a position to grant favors, he granted two of some importance to his friend. He protected him from the application of the Nuremberg Laws (Albrecht's mother was half-Jewish), and he made him his unofficial adviser on foreign policy. Later, he secured an academic post for him and a position in Ribbentrop's Foreign Ministry.

Like his father, Albrecht was a geographer by academic training, and with him he edited the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*. He considered himself to be an expert on England, although this seems to have been based on little more than a few visits, the possession of a number of English friends and acquaintances (including the Duke of Hamilton, whom he had met at the Olympic Games in 1936), and a deep admiration of the English way of life, which he saw in romanticized terms. Haushofer believed in any case that Britain and Germany were natural allies, and for that reason he was profoundly disturbed by the tendency of Hitler's foreign policy after 1936, which he felt would lead inevitably to conflict with the island power. Such a clash, he thought, would almost certainly bring the United States into the field, for, in his words, "the British Empire is just as important for America's security as the other way round." He tried to persuade his superiors in the Foreign Ministry that Hitler's course was dangerous and, when the Western cave-in at Munich seemed to prove him wrong, argued in print that another British surrender could not be expected and that "the whole of British history . . . would have to be rewritten if one wanted to believe that present-day British armaments are merely bluff." This warning was also disregarded, and the conflict he feared came remorselessly on.

Its outbreak left Haushofer in a state of despair, which deepened when he learned, after the fall of France, that Hitler was planning an attack on Russia, to take place in May, 1941. Certain that a two-front war would destroy Germany and deliver Europe over to Communism, Haushofer became convinced that an accommodation with Great Britain was the only way to stave off that future. Since the spring of 1940, he had

been in touch with Ulrich von Hassell, Johannes Popitz, and other members of the resistance, who were seeking to promote a military coup against Hitler. In talks with them, Haushofer urged that the best way to galvanize the generals to action would be to secure a British promise to cease hostilities if a soldiers' *Putsch* were successful, and he supplied the names of English friends who might serve as intermediaries with their government for that purpose.

Haushofer gave the same names to his protector, Rudolf Hess, when the Deputy Fuehrer, perhaps with Hitler's knowledge, consulted him in September, 1940, about the possibilities of peace with Britain. And it is here that Haushofer's crucial role in the Hess affair becomes apparent. For, as he wrote later, among other possible contacts, he "mentioned . . . the young Duke of Hamilton who has access at all times to all important persons in London, even to Churchill and the King."

Haushofer agreed to try to arrange a meeting with the duke on neutral soil, but the letter that he sent to Hamilton, by way of Lisbon, was intercepted by the British Secret Service and never delivered. Hess, however, was not prepared to leave things at that. By the beginning of 1941 his influence with Hitler was declining as a result of the emergence of new rivals like Bormann and Hitler's preoccupation with military matters. He desired to retrieve his fortunes by an act of individual daring that would serve his country and the Fuehrer. He resolved, therefore, to go to Hamilton himself, and through his good offices, to arrange a peace with England that would assure the success of the pending invasion of Russia.

Douglas-Hamilton pays appropriate attention to the planning ability, the aeronautical skill, and the personal bravery that were needed to put this resolution into action, but he also makes it clear that there was never any chance of the mission succeeding. Leaving aside the naïveté of Hess's belief that dukes were still so important that they could change national policy by means of a few words with the monarch (the Duke of Hamilton was in fact an RAF wing commander on active duty and had no political influence to speak of), his great mistake was in thinking that anyone with political responsibility in

Britain in 1941 was willing to make peace with Hitler, or, for that matter, even with a non-Nazi Germany that did not couple its offer with a withdrawal of its troops from the territories occupied by them. When Winston Churchill, who learned of Hess's arrival during a showing of a Marx Brothers film, decided to continue watching it, he was making an appropriate comment on Hess's mission: as far as the course of the war was concerned, it was irrelevant. The Deputy Fuehrer's disjointed proposals of peace on Hitler's terms were listened to with scant patience by officials far less exalted than he had expected to meet, and he was then—justly, one must conclude, in view of his increasingly erratic behavior—handed over to psychiatrists until it was time for him to go to Nuremberg and Spandau.

For Albrecht Haushofer the results were no less calamitous. What Albert Speer has described as Hitler's "inarticulate, almost animal shout" when he heard the news of Hess's escapade spelled doom in the long run for everyone connected with it. The first to suffer were Hess's personal aides, who had known of the flight but believed that it was authorized by Hitler; some of the staff at the Augsburg Airport, the point of departure; and any number of astrologers, nature therapists, and anthroposophists with whom Hess had been associating in recent months. Haushofer avoided the fate that befell most of these people for some time, largely by the nimbleness with which he side-stepped the snares set for him in Gestapo interrogations and by a colossal piece of bluff. While denying any complicity in Hess's flight, he was entirely candid about his letter to Hamilton and about his other connections with Englishmen in high places. Indeed, he exaggerated them in such a way as to give the impression that he would be the indispensable man if ever a new approach to the British government should be considered advisable. His persuasiveness was so great that Hitler ordered him to be set at liberty in July, 1941; and even after he was arrested again in the wake of the attempt on Hitler's life in July, 1944, he was—although by this time his ties with the resistance were pretty well known—saved from summary trial and execution by Heinrich Himmler, who had a fantastic notion that, with Haushofer's help, he might

save his own neck by making a deal with the English.

But all this was mere respite. After months of imprisonment, during which he wrote those *Sonnets from Moabit* which are among the most moving of the documents that survived the Nazi holocaust, Albrecht Haushofer was shot to death by the SS a month before the war's end.

Compared with Mr. Douglas-Hamilton's fine study, which, with impressive documentation, gives what will probably be generally regarded as the most plausible explanation of its subject, J. Bernard Hutton's book on Hess is an altogether less considerable work. It does not, to be sure, lack liveliness, much of which is derived from verbatim conversations between the actors in the drama, but since no sources are given for these, one suspects that most of them have been constructed by the author for dramatic effect. There are frequent inaccuracies (Hess was not, for example, the man "who plotted and commanded" the Blood Purge of 1934) and some exaggeration that borders on the ludicrous (a comparison of Karl Haushofer with Karl Marx, for example, which concludes: "Karl Marx had his Lenin. Haushofer had his Hess"). Mr. Hutton insists that Hess told Hitler of his intention to fly to England—indeed, he gives us the conversation in which he did so, again without citing the source—and intimates that Hitler did not demur. He says that if only Hitler had kept quiet about his deputy's disappearance for two more days, and if only Hess had not "insisted that Winston Churchill should be deposed before Hitler's peace terms were discussed, it is possible Mr. Churchill, in secret conference with Hess, could have made decisions of great importance." These may, in short, "have been fateful hours for many who died later!" Neither this, nor his additional statement that Churchill "feared that if Hess's mission became widely known throughout Britain there would be public resentment that the British government had not given more consideration to the peace offer," is very persuasive.

The greater part of Mr. Hutton's book is devoted to Hess's detention in England and his mental deterioration (which he hints may have been caused by his treatment there), to his trial at Nuremberg, and to the long

years of imprisonment in Spandau. He is the last prisoner in Spandau, and his sentence drags on because of the Soviet government's refusal to consider an abbreviation of it. Mr. Hutton suggests that this intransigence is due to lingering suspicion that an Anglo-German arrangement and a common drive against Russia were real possibilities in 1941, and to the additional fact that Hess's lawyer at Nuremberg embarrassed the

Soviet government by revealing the existence of a secret protocol to the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression treaty of August, 1939, which provided for a division of spoils in Eastern Europe in the event of war. Whether he is right on this score or not, most people will probably not dispute his contention that, after thirty years of confinement, Hess has paid for his crimes and should be allowed to live out in freedom what remains of his life.

MOVIES

IT ONLY HURTS WHEN WE LAUGH

by David Denby

PLAZA SUITE

directed by Arthur Hiller
Paramount

BANANAS

directed by Woody Allen
United Artists

With the exception of Bill Manhoff's *The Owl and the Pussycat* (which was spruced up considerably by screenwriter Buck Henry), I can't think of a single Broadway comedy in the last few years that has been made into a really enjoyable movie. One reason is that most good movie directors prefer to start with fresh or little-known material rather than wrestle with everyone's darling smash hit of the previous season. Another is that the popular Broadway material isn't as strong as it used to be. Commercial theater comedy is designed for a rather specific and limited audience: the upper middle class of New York and businessmen and tourists from around the country. This audience has had its problems in the last few years (children, money, crime), and comfortable people in trouble aren't noted for the boldness of their humor. The old American confidence probably helped to give our comedies their buoyant spirit; in response to present times and the relative unhappiness of the audience, the Broadway commodities have turned sour, baffled, querulous.

The movie audience, on the other hand, is too varied to impose a single set of preoccupations or a dominant mood onto its entertainment. A healthy section of it is both tougher

and more relaxed than the theater audience (I'm not including, of course, the people who go to off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway plays), qualities which are immensely liberating for film-makers. Movies made directly for this audience, like *Bananas*, the new Woody Allen picture, have at least the possibility of introducing something fresh.

Normally, I wouldn't waste space discussing something as dreary as the movie version of *Plaza Suite*, but I found myself very surprised by how crass Neil Simon's material has become. In last year's *The Out-of-Towners* (a movie made from material that couldn't be used in *Plaza Suite*), a couple from Ohio who are scouting a move to New York are subjected in a single day to every possible indignity and minor catastrophe which that city could produce in a century. With its protagonists caught on a treadmill of humiliation, the movie was mechanical, unfunny, and close to sadistic, but what made it really ugly was Simon's providing ample opportunity, in the midst of all this tribulation, for the hysterical husband (Jack Lemmon) to be shown up as a bloody fool in front of his wife (Sandy Dennis).

The Out-of-Towners is a weak example of Simon's work, but its methods are typical. As an ex-situation-comedy writer for television, he employs the formulas of television humor with a vengeance: the situation is set up so that the characters will be discomforted and angry; they respond with nagging and bickering—bickering raised to passion—and tre-

mendous comic arguments result (often what's funny is the contrast between the passion of the argument and the triviality of what's argued); the predicament and the jokes are obsessively reiterated, until finally there is a lull and we are given a little moment of truth and self-knowledge that mercifully allows the piece to end. In the recent Simon movies, what is revealed at the end is not the foolish but essentially decent human being of most comedy, but instead a person in trouble who has been reduced in humanity by the author's exposure of his panic.

Plaza Suite, like *The Out-of-Towners*, was directed by Arthur Hiller; Hiller was also responsible for *Love Story*, so we are probably going to see a lot of crude, ugly, all-but-incompetent movies by this man in the next few years. In *Plaza Suite*, some of the acting is shrill; the star, Walter Matthau, is amateurishly made up; the close-in camera positioning and relentless tracking within an enclosed space threaten to induce claustrophobia; and the color is sallow and washed out, turning the performers and the sets a depressing yellow-gray.

Perhaps Matthau has turned gray from boredom; he has played in so many of these sour-mash comedies in recent years that his face has taken on a look of permanent exasperation. The eyes are dead, the mouth an immense black hole, and he barely relates to the other actors around him. When he lets out his hollow voice for a bit of cant he still can be funny (he wouldn't be bad as the man in the White House), but unless he gets some real characters to play, he might as well be doing his sullen routines in a television series.

Plaza Suite consists of three separate skits. In the stage production, George C. Scott and Maureen Stapleton starred in all three, and under Mike Nichols' direction the shabbiness of the material was disguised; with Matthau taking over for Scott, two additional actresses joining Miss Stapleton (which kills half the fun), and Hiller directing, Simon's inadequacies are glaringly exposed (and he wrote the screenplay). In the first story Maureen Stapleton plays a middle-aged woman trying to hold on to her husband (Matthau), a self-important businessman who has started an office affair to stave off his fear of

getting old. With irony, wit, and a superior honesty going for her, she at first has our sympathy; but as Simon goes for laughs by turning her into a humorous nag, she becomes such a pain in the neck that we end up feeling the husband may be right. In trying to hold on, she has made herself more unattractive—a scene which should not, I think, be done as comedy; as it works out, bits of genuine cruelty glint through the mediocre comic pathos.

In the second part Matthau plays a florid Hollywood phony, a big-time movie producer trying to score with an old girlfriend (lovely Barbara Harris) he left behind many years ago in Tenafly, New Jersey. Despite all her determination to resist, she finally warms up to him when it turns out he knows Frank Sinatra, Lee Marvin, Jill St. John, etc. It might have made a funny little nightclub satire on celebrity worship, something like an old Nichols and May routine, but Simon gets us so involved in the toils of her nervous weakness and hypocrisy that it becomes a long, ugly locker-room joke—a kind of suburban equivalent to the farmer's daughter.

Matthau and Lee Grant have better material in the last skit, and they are funny as the parents of the bride, tearing their expensive clothes to pieces as they try to get their daughter to come out of the bathroom in which she has enclosed herself in a bit of last-minute wedding-day panic. The situation is pure dumb farce, perhaps the most successful laugh-machine that Simon has ever constructed; the only souring factor this time is the couple's implausible failure to offer the daughter the least bit of understanding or love. I wonder if the people sitting around me at the Radio City Music Hall who howled at this scene were bothered by the meanness and panic in it.

It's possible to write comedy in which the characters have little feeling for each other, but when an author doesn't love his own creations, doesn't allow them the greatest possible energy to expand their absurdity or villainy or whatever, when he restricts them to endless repetition of a single characteristic and leaves them stranded at the end, then comedy is cold and all but dead.

Woody Allen is probably the best comic talent working in American

movies today, but also about the most erratic. His new picture, *Bananas*, of which he is director, star, and writer (in collaboration with Mickey Rose), has some ideas that are so bad we may laugh simply because he's really going through with them; at other moments it seems he may yet become a popular satirist of genius.

Much of his humor is intentionally "stupid," intentionally sophomoric; like an irrepressible college humorist who somehow never graduated, he is always freshly enthralled by the world's absurdity, always eager to prove the power of far-out humor to take the measure of that absurdity. Occasionally his stupid jokes have a rather sneaky force if you're aware of the reality behind them. The film opens with a television show: it's ABC's *Wide World of Sports* bringing us live coverage of the assassination of the President of a small Latin-American republic. The sequence features real sports announcers—Don Dunphy and ineffable Howard Cosell, looking like an inquisitive eel. Cosell interviews the participants: "Well, of course you're upset and that's understandable under the circumstances," he says to the dying President.

At his best Allen mocks the dead language of television, movies, and advertising by placing the clichés in an absurd context or by gleefully exaggerating them. (He has written his own blurbs for the newspaper ads: "Moving, rich, tense, taut, filligreed, and gossamer.") Most of his ideas, however, are closer to free-flying nonsense humor, exhilarating and undisciplined, but without the aggressive force of the film's opening. One has to speak of separate ideas rather than an overall conception because Allen hasn't bothered to impose a unified style or theme on his material. Satire, burlesque, slapstick, and parody are all jumbled together. A courtroom sequence in which Allen is tried for subversive activities is simultaneously a halfhearted satire on the Chicago conspiracy trial and a parody of the Perry Mason show; a burlesque of revolutionary heroism and privation (Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestre) is interrupted with parodies of contemporary movie clichés; and so on.

Allen is so impatient that he can't sustain or develop anything, and his movie keeps darting off in odd direc-

tions or pausing demurely for little interludes. Some of the gags are linked by a kind of comic free association, and the plot—Allen gets involved in a Latin-American revolution to impress his ex-girlfriend—is so casual and intermittent that it seems to be there mainly to tease our assumption that a movie *needs* a plot. He unfortunately lacks the physical abilities of the great movie comics of the past—the athleticism and balletic grace that allowed them to recover from the most compromising mishaps with such brilliant panache that the recovery became the basis for the next gag. When Allen takes a pratfall he looks genuinely clumsy, and the sequence has to end. It is this failure to give his work any overall comic line—both physically and intellectually—that holds his pictures down to the middling-good level.

Like those great men of the past, he is trying to create a consistent character for himself from movie to movie. The bank robber who couldn't write a legible hold-up note in *Take the Money and Run* is the same man who gets an invitation to dine with a military dictator in *Bananas* and arrives at the palace carrying a pastry assortment for his host. He is a man who would gladly ingratiate himself wherever possible if he could only overcome his truly radical incompetence. Terrifically inert by nature, he's so other-directed that he winds up performing heroic deeds just because people ask him. And when he acts, he's bound to run through the entire Yiddish lexicon for comic ineptitude: a *shlimazl* one minute, a *shmendrick* the next, a something-else the third. His contretemps with the talcum powder when he's preparing for his girl betrays the ingrained sloppiness of a man irrevocably removed from physical graciousness; the scene just falls short of being very ugly. Of course, he always manages to rob the bank, lead the revolution, and get the girl, so his clumsiness makes a rather feeble ironic point: if this fellow can succeed, then the world must be run by even greater idiots and worse incompetents.

As a satirist, Allen is not without the diffidence of his screen character. It's good that he's not protecting any of the conventional pieties (he's free, for instance, to attack Castro *and* the CIA), and he has the originality to

change an old emphasis or shift a familiar target (in a spoof of psychoanalysis he makes fun of the patient's revelations rather than the analyst's jargon). With the whole of American culture as his province he'll probably never run out of absurdities

to work up into sharp little bits, but on the other hand, the lack of any moral or political position whatsoever prevents his work from having much bite. He has the sophistication for a truly cleansing American satire, but at present, not the guts.

THE PERIPATETIC REVIEWER

by Edward Weeks

THE MARQUIS DE CUSTINE AND HIS RUSSIA IN 1839

by George F. Kennan

Princeton University Press, \$6.00

In his knowledge of the Russian people and his interpretation of Soviet policy, former Ambassador George F. Kennan has few peers. This brief, illuminating book joins his own perception to that of an astute Frenchman, the Marquis de Custine, who in 1839 spent a summer in the Russia of Nicholas I, with prophetic consequence. Custine and Tocqueville were aristocrats of the same vintage, and each had suffered from the French Revolution, Custine's father and grandfather both having been guillotined. When their fortunes were restored, Tocqueville in his thirties and Custine in his late forties made intellectual explorations, the former evaluating the most promising democracy in the new world, and the latter the most absolute of all monarchies. Mr. Kennan's book is accordingly a character study, a fascinating travelogue, and a profound comparison of the Russia which Custine experienced with the Soviet Union of today.

The Marquis de Custine was a cultivated Parisian, a handsome romantic, supersensitive because of the scandal of homosexuality which had soiled him as a young man. His mother was a beauty, Chateaubriand's mistress, who is remembered as Delphine in Madame de Staël's novel. When her son was cold-shouldered by society, he sought to redeem himself in literature; he traveled well—he "read" countries, he claimed, as other people read books; his book on Spain proved more successful than his novels. At Balzac's urging, he aimed for Russia, and Turgenev, the older cousin of the great Russian nov-

elist, equipped him with letters of introduction to the intellectuals in St. Petersburg. Ostensibly Custine's motive was to substantiate his faith in government by aristocracy, but as Mr. Kennan skillfully discloses, the Marquis was already suspicious of the Czar's tyranny, made so by his sympathy for Polish refugees who had fled from the Uprising of 1830-1831, and his friendships with the Russians who had been exiled to France after the Decembrist riots. He went looking for imperfections, and after his reception at Court and three summer months spent in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and the country, traveling seventy-five miles a day by coach with the best of horses on the worst of roads, he recrossed the border at Tilsit on his way home: "A bird escaped from the cage could not, he said, have been happier."

Back in Paris he ordered his thoughts, and then in 1842, spurred by Tocqueville's example, he published a work of eighteen hundred pages which, despite a hostile press, went through seven editions in a short time and was widely translated and pirated. Europeans criticized it for the gossip and inconsistencies; Russians, the Emperor included, despised it for its unflattering picture of Russian society. Travelers of that day, Mr. Kennan points out, were supposed to provide only facts and descriptions; Custine's "philosophic and political insights . . . fell utterly without resonance on Victorian susceptibilities . . . he detected, in the glimpse he had of Russia in the summer of 1839, traits in the mentality of Russian government and society, some active, some latent, the recognition and correction of which would be vital to the future success and security of Russian society."

Hard truths are usually repugnant,

and in the final chapter, "Custine in Retrospect," it is clear that Kennan himself will receive some of the abuse which was once showered on the Marquis, evidence that the Frenchman's judgment was more than a little prophetic.

PRIVATE WORLDS

by Sarah Gainham

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, \$6.95

There is always a risk in planning a sequence of novels about a single person or a family such as the Forsytes of London or the Whiteoaks of Ontario. The advantage is that the leading characters take root in the mind, and as they grow their behavior under stress becomes a matter of anxiety or gratification, almost as if they were our kin. The disadvantage is that with each entry into a new sequel the reader must catch up the threads of what has gone before, and unless the novelist is adroit, the references to the past, especially the crises, demand inordinate space and lessen our interest in the present.

In the first two novels of her Julia Homburg trilogy, *Night Falls on the City*, and *A Place in the Country*, Sarah Gainham very surely aroused our sympathy for her heroine, a leading actress in Vienna who came under suspicion and then persecution as her conquered country passed from the bullying of the Nazis to the rough usage of the Russians. For seven years Julia had gambled her life to protect her Jewish husband, hidden away in a secret room in her apartment. She divorced him as a pretext, but after his tragic death she sought refuge in her battered country house, and there her recuperation and her reunion with an old admirer, Georgy Kerenyi, the Hungarian editor, gaunt from his Russian imprisonment and limping from his wounds, formed the substance of Miss Gainham's second novel.

Miss Gainham's problem in her new book, *Private Worlds*, is to show us how Julia and Kerenyi, now married and refreshed in spirit by their honeymoon in Greece, are able to reconcile and adjust to each other in the redecorated apartment in Vienna, so full of ghosts. In this I feel that the novelist succeeds: Julia's dreamy endeavor to absorb the leading role in the revival of *Antony and Cleopatra* and Georgy's penetrating ironic hun-

ger to possess her, here and now, are well contrasted. But the novelist's overriding responsibility is to keep the story moving briskly in the present, and that is where I think Miss Gainham has failed. By her skillful threading of the past and the present she has managed to affiliate us with these cultivated Viennese as they struggle to regain their balance in life, but the narrative moves too slowly, with long stretches of dialogue which stress nuance rather than vitality; and their suffering in the past, of which they are all reminded by the reappearance of a detestable SS General, too often muffles the action in the foreground.

MERCURY

by Katherine and Peter Montague
A Sierra Club Battlebook, \$2.25

Environmental pollution is frustrating because it appears from unexpected sources with so little warning. We had just begun to fence in the danger of pesticides, or so we believed, when the danger of mercury appeared in salt water and fresh; the swordfish was banished; and the TVA lakes, once thought to be a recreation area, were closed to fishermen and hunters. How did the swordfish acquire that mercury content? How long have they had it? How accurately can we determine what is presently a dangerous level of mercury in the absence of any past study of "normal levels" in foodstuffs? These are some of the questions Katherine and Peter Montague of the Southwest Research and Information Center in Albuquerque answer in their lucid and accusing Battlebook.

The Montagues begin by describing mercury and its peculiar characteristics, and then go into a brisk history of the recognition of the mercury poisoning as a result of eating contaminated fish, a recognition made in Japan in the early 1950s followed by studies in Sweden which led to the prohibition of mercury-based insecticides in that country. The Swedes publicized their findings and so alerted world health authorities. Our Embassy in Stockholm peppered Washington with reports, but not until the late 1960s, when the indubitable and increasing mercury content in our fish could not be denied, did the federal authorities act. And according to the Montagues, our

testing techniques were hastily improvised and inferior to what had been developed in Sweden and Canada. Not only are we late, say the Montagues, but we are hesitant; a company manufacturing a pesticide thought to be dangerous has simply defied the order to remove the stuff from the market and has settled down to a long court battle. Two conclusions emerge from this book: that the effects of mercury poisoning are frightening and that the vigilance of the Food and Drug Administration leaves much to be desired.

MYSELF AMONG OTHERS

by Ruth Gordon

Atheneum, \$10.00

Ruth Gordon is the best actress that Boston, or to be exact, Wollaston, Massachusetts, has produced in sixty years, and when she headed for Broadway her father, home from the sea, gave her his spyglass which he said she could hock for \$100. Otherwise she had no more back of her than did Jack Donahue or Fred Allen. On the evening of December 31, 1915, Alex Woolcott, the young drama critic of the *New York Times* spotted her playing a bit part in Maude Adams' revival of *Peter Pan*, and his comment, "Ruth Gordon was ever so gay as Nibs," which appeared in an otherwise unenthusiastic review was the beginning of a love that never ceased until his death. Alex was the greatest ballyhooer America has known, and the reproduction of his radio scripts at the beginning of *Myself Among Others* serves two purposes: it gives the unacquainted a panorama of those glorious parts Miss Gordon made her own, and it reminds us of that rococo, creampuff prose that would have been interminable in any other voice but Alex's. Then Ruth takes us to Woolcott's deathbed and recalls what she said at the memorial service with an honesty of feeling that clutches at the heart.

Myself Among Others is a jackdaw's nest, full of every kind of memory of the theater, the bright and the small, the gay and the glib, the ostentatious and the Yankee sharp that this talented bird has been collecting on her timeless wings. She lets people depict themselves by what they say or do; she is not given to adjectives and there is none of the rehearsal sweat and anguish which wracks a per-

former like Agnes de Mille. Ruth keeps to the surface but she has her favorites, and when they appear, that inimitable Wollaston drawl with which she tells her stories is charged with warmth: they are, in addition to Alex, Ethel Barrymore, Thornton Wilder, Somerset Maugham, Charles Laughton, and, without any forcing, that considerate, enhancing husband she found in Garson Kanin.

SHORT REVIEWS BOOKS

by Phoebe Adams

MRS. PALFREY AT THE CLAREMONT by Elizabeth Taylor. Viking, \$5.95. The Claremont is a London hotel inhabited by a number of elderly, long-term clients who give the place the characteristics of a superior boardinghouse. In short, they sit about the public rooms and snoop into each other's affairs. This annoys the management and leads old Mrs. Palfrey, the latest arrival, to establish social status by the acquisition and display of a phony grandson. Deception weaves the usual tangled web, tragicomic and described by Miss Taylor with a wit as light and dry as autumn grass and a perception as sharp as a needle.

THE OMNIVOROUS APE by Lyall Watson. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, \$5.95. The author seeks to account for human development and character by a study of mankind's eating habits. Some of his notions—that cooking in hot springs may have preceded the use of fire, for instance—are persuasive, but too often he sees traces of primitive man in manifestations, like the deliberately underlit restaurant, which are quite recent fashions. His style is provocative: translation, smart-aleck.

OLD AGE: THE LAST SEGREGATION by Claire Townsend and others. Grossman, \$6.95. Introduction by Ralph Nader, whose raiders have compiled this survey of conditions in nursing homes. The report arouses melancholy rather than anger, for the abuses described are caused by stupidity and lack of planning more often than by greed or illegality. One gathers that a nursing home could be

run with the most conscientious obedience to the requirements of state, federal, and medical authorities and still be a miserable death trap.

GRAFFITI by Robert Reisner. Cowles, \$5.95. Except for the excellent chapter on Kilroy, Mr. Reisner's discussion of what people write on walls and why is longer than necessary, but his collected specimens are superb. They are arranged by subject in the back of the book, like those naughty Latin passages which, in Byron's youth, "saved, in fact, the trouble of an index."

WINNERS GOT SCARS TOO: THE LIFE AND LEGENDS OF JOHNNY CASH by Christopher S. Wren. Dial, \$6.95. Cash fans will be happy with this entirely sympathetic and admiring biography. Even non-Cash fans may be interested in the nerve-wracking life of musicians on the road, and in Cash's boyhood, much of which was spent in a Depression-generated, little-publicized (Socialism—grrr!) experimental farming town in Arkansas.

PAUL KANE'S FRONTIER by Paul Kane, edited with a biographical introduction by J. Russell Harper. University of Texas, \$27.50. Kane, a rather casually trained Canadian artist, roamed the Western wilderness in the 1840s, furiously painting Indians, collecting their artifacts, and recording their stories. He also wrote a book about his adventures. Kane's text, the beautifully reproduced pictures, and Mr. Harper's careful checking of dates, places, influences, and errors (he suspects Kane of a pictorially effective but ethnologically scandalous use of props) make a handsome re-creation of a long-gone world.

MADAME by Patrick O'Higgins. Viking, \$7.95. Socially, Madame was Princess Gourielli; professionally, she was Helena Rubinstein, a cosmetics tycoon with a formidably unpredictable temper. She collected things. She also collected young Mr. O'Higgins, who spent years as traveling companion, confidential secretary, and odd-job man to the mercurial old lioness. The experience has enabled him to write in detail of Madame's last years and of the amusing world of high fashion and financial

melodrama in which she moved. About her early life, Mr. O'Higgins is wary; he knows that much of what he knows is not reliable.

BEFORE COLUMBUS by Cyrus H. Gordon. Crown, \$6.50. With the support of highly eclectic evidence from a number of fields, Dr. Gordon argues that a Bronze Age commercial empire, possibly based on Crete, traded for centuries with Central and South America. He is well aware that this is a radical notion and at times becomes a bit strident both in defending it and in dissociating himself from those nineteenth-century diffusionists who attributed all New World oddities to Prince Madoc or the Ten Lost Tribes. He also avoids considering one discouraging fact: while he can find all sorts of plausible traces of European presence in the Americas, he cannot point to any certainly American items in prehistoric Europe. It is not hard to believe that the Atlantic was crossed occasionally at an early date, but that a regular trade route operating for hundreds of years left not a single exotic souvenir behind—that is a very large gnat to swallow.

THE WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN by Virgilio Martini. Dial, \$5.95. Written in the mid-1930s, published with difficulty, banned here and prosecuted there, this vitriolic work has finally turned up in English. The book's difficulties are understandable; in less than one hundred pages, the author manages to slaughter everybody's sacred cow. It is a stimulating feat. Translated by Emile Capouya.

CLAUDE LORRAIN by Sabine Cotté. Braziller, \$7.95. A particularly attractive item in The Great Draughtsmen series, a veritable encyclopedia of types of trees and ways to draw them (pen and ink, brush and ink, pencil, chalk, tinted wash, tinted paper—Claude used them all, singly and in inventive combination). The text is short but interesting for its examination of the artist's methods of composition. Translated by Helen Sebba.

THE ONION EATERS by J. P. Donleavy. Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, \$6.95. The opening section of Mr. Donleavy's latest novel appeared in the *May Atlantic*.

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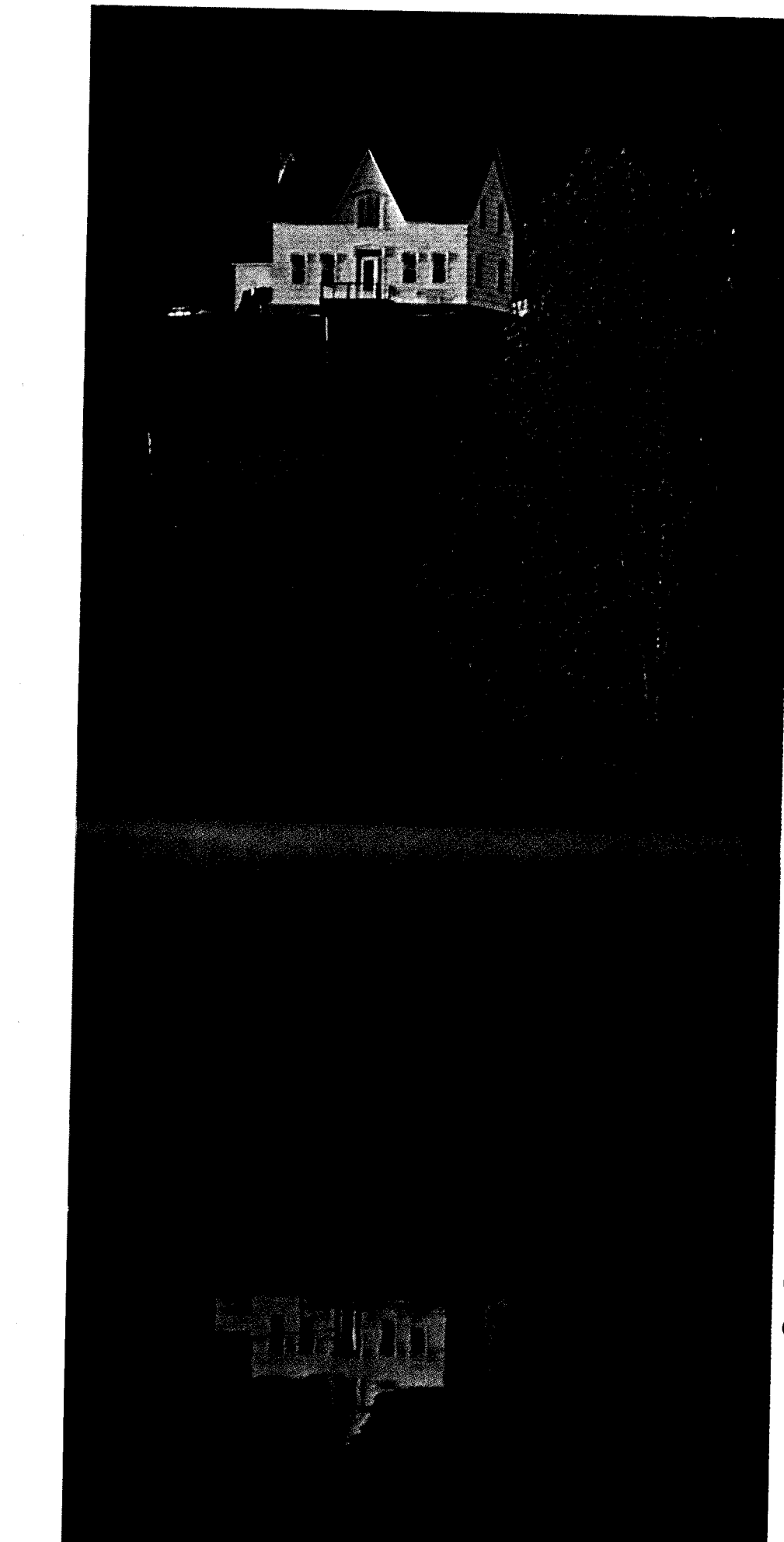
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